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Press Opinions

As the industry of Lecky produced a "History of Rationalism in Europe," a work marred by the author's inadequate acquaintance with the intellectual history of Christianity, so it is now the object of a group of Catholic scholars to write in successive monographs an account of the development of Catholic thought from the dawn of the Christian era, and this series—called "Catholic Thought and Thinkers"—has been started by Father C. C. Martindale in a volume styled *Introductory*. In five chapters the author surveys the interplay between orthodoxy and heterodoxy during five distinct periods of Church history—from the beginning to the death of Origen (254), from Origen to the death of Augustine (430), from the Sack of Rome (476) to the decline of the Middle Age (1303), thence to the Revolution (1789), and, finally, in the Modern era. Thus the framework is erected in which the various great Catholic thinkers will find their respective places, showing the continuity of Christian tradition and its orderly process of development. But Father Martindale's work is more than a framework: brilliant little pen pictures of the leaders of Christian thought, illuminating *aperçus* of their historical surroundings, apt summaries of the inheritance and legacy of each epoch, make the book exceedingly interesting, and will make, we hope, the public for which the series is designed eager for its speedy and regular appearance.

THE MONTH.

A series of volumes which ought to prove of great interest to the general educated public. Their aim is to provide a more or less complete account of Catholic thought from the earliest times down to the present day, and thinkers whose orthodoxy is not beyond suspicion will be included in the series. Father Martindale is responsible for the Introductory volume, and his historical survey, as we should expect from him, is able and broad-minded.

THE CHURCH TIMES

Truly an ambitious scheme! Yet if we may conjecture from the success of Father Martindale's *Introductory*, the scheme is likely to be achieved with distinction. To compress within one hundred and sixty pages an account of Catholic "thought" from the days before the Council of Ephesus to the last Ecumenical Council of the Vatican is in itself something of an intellectual feat. Needless to remark, in so comprehensive a sketch little can be said in particular of the individual "Thinkers." Father Martindale has fortunately a very happy manner of saying the little that is just enough to indicate the Catholic Thinker's place in the historical setting. *THE CATHOLIC TIMES.*

Rarely have we read a book with so much pleasure as that which we have received from "Catholic Thought and Thinkers," by C. C. Martindale, S.J. The purpose of the series of which this is the title is to provide us with a continuous feast of Catholic thought, displayed in the makers of thought in each succeeding age. This programme has happily called forth an Introductory volume which provides exactly what was wanted—an explanation of the series and a rapid panoramic view of the procession of thinkers. This by no means easy task has been well performed by Father Martindale; the present volume, besides being of value to every cultured reader, will prove a most serviceable aid to the student in his theology and especially in the history of philosophy, and readers of the series will do well to keep this Introduction always by them.

CATHOLIC BOOK NOTES.

It gives a clear view of the development of Catholic thought from Justin Martyr through the Controversies to Aquinas and the Reformation, and then through the great Roman mystics and theologians to the Catholic renaissance, but it links the general development of European morals and philosophy, and shows how Catholic influence reacted on the general tendencies of the Christian era.

THE GLASGOW HERALD.

CATHOLIC THOUGHT & THINKERS SERIES
Edited by C. C. Martindale, S.J., M.A.

Erasmus of Rotterdam

CATHOLIC THOUGHT
AND THINKERS

Erasmus of Rotterdam

By

MAURICE WILKINSON

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Editor's Preface

THE scope of this series can be very accurately defined.

It is not meant to be a history of the Christian Church, nor even of Christian theology. Nor is it intended to set out the influence exercised in the world by the Catholic Church in every department alike, social, for example, artistic, or even moral. But Christian men have thought about their Faith in itself ; and about the world they live in, because of their Faith, and in relation to it. These volumes, therefore, aim at giving the reader pictures of eminent Catholic thinkers,[1] and a sufficient statement of what they thought, and of the substantial contribution which they thus made to the history of ideas in the world, and to Christian civilization in particular.

The writers have aimed at allowing their subjects, as far as possible, to speak for themselves : only a necessary minimum of comment or criticism has been supplied. On the other hand, it has been wished that not bloodless schemes of thought, merely,

[1] This is not meant to preclude this series from containing, if desirable, studies of men who, like Origen or John Eriugena, may not have been fully orthodox, or who, like Lamennais, have ended in rupture, even, from Catholic obedience.

nor abstract theories, should be made available to our readers ; nor again, detached " lives " of men and isolated personalities. Therefore a preliminary and a concluding volume have been planned, in which, respectively, are set out the massive historical movement within which these men were born, developed, and exerted their influence ; and, the continuous currents of thought which they necessarily created, deflected, accelerated or checked. It should be added that the respective authors have freely formed and expressed their own estimates of their subject-matter, and that the series as such is not responsible for these. Nor has it been intended that the method of treatment and its application should be absolutely homogeneous in all the volumes alike.

Thus these volumes are not meant, then, at all as propaganda or apologetic. They hope to supply an organic survey of Catholic thought and a " live genealogy " of Catholic thinkers ; so that, from a comprehensive view and continuous vital contact, each reader may draw such general conclusions as he is able ; or enrich, substantiate, or correct, what he already possesses.

Contents

EDITOR'S PREFACE . . pp. 7, 8
AUTHOR'S PREFACE . . pp. 15, 16

CHAPTER I

SOCIETY IN THE EARLY SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Erasmus's birth and parentage—The spread of the Renaissance—Its character in Italy, France, and the Empire—Its Neo-Paganism and materialistic spirit—The sixteenth century as the beginning of modern Europe—The antithesis between the Renaissance and the mediæval spirit—Comparison between the new learning in Italy, France, the Empire, and England—The ground exceedingly favourable for the spread of the Reformation in Germany, England, and the Netherlands . pp. 17–35

CHAPTER II

THE YOUTH AND MATURITY OF ERASMUS

Erasmus's appearance and education—He enters the Augustinian priory of Steyn—Ordained priest by the Bishop of Utrecht—Dangers of entering an order without real vocation—Dispensed from the monastic life and enters the service of the Bishop of Cambrai—He goes to the University of Paris—In Paris he makes the acquaintance of William Blount,

which is the occasion of his visit to England—Travel a feature of the Middle Ages and Insularity a product of the Reformation—In London Erasmus began his life-long friendship with More, Colet, and Warham—He leaves England: troubles at Dover—His determination to visit Italy and methods of obtaining the necessary money—His second visit to England and departure for Bologna; interview with Julius II—His third visit to England and the Cambridge period—Henry VIII's offer of patronage; Erasmus Rector of Aldington and Warham's kindness—The pilgrimage to St. Thomas, Canterbury, and to Our Lady, Walsingham; reflections on pilgrimages—Erasmus again at Cambridge—The appearance of his Greek New Testament and Latin version; the beginning of his fame—His final departure from England . . pp. 36–58

CHAPTER III

HIS ZENITH AND THE BEGINNINGS OF PROTESTANTISM

Erasmus summoned to the Court at Brussels—Fresh trouble over his dispensation—Correspondence with Servatius Rogerus, prior of Steyn—Ammonius undertakes to obtain a complete dispensation, which is granted by Leo X—The Reuchlin controversy—Leo X's character and magnificence—The party of

conservative reform and the appearance of Luther—Erasmus's fear and dislike of Luther —He urges the Elector of Mainz to moderation in the matter of Tetzel and the Indulgences— His New Testament causes alarm to the conservatives, although it appeared with the approval of Leo X—Erasmus's chief opponents —Luther's open defiance of the Church— Erasmus refuses him any further support even of the hitherto limited kind—The Diet of Worms and its results—The party of innovation and heresy henceforth irreconcilable—Growing suspicion of Erasmus's attitude; Erasmus supported by the Popes, but under constant attacks shows some lack of prudence—St. Ignatius and the works of Erasmus—The subsequent attitude of the Society of Jesus towards him . . . . pp. 59–86

CHAPTER IV

HIS TROUBLES AND LATER YEARS

Open hostility to Luther—Death of Leo X and accession of Adrian VI—His character, austerity, and piety—His determination to correct abuses—He appeals to Erasmus to rise in God's cause and stops the Carmelite attack on him—Adrian's short reign and his disappointments; succeeded by Clement VII— The violence and iconoclasm of the Reformers —Erasmus and Ulrich von Hutten—Luther's

contemptuous letter to Erasmus—Erasmus replies with his *De Libero Arbitrio*—Erasmus's triumph and the delight of the Catholic world —Correspondence with Melanchthon, the only reformer with whom Erasmus continued friendly relations to the end—Erasmus at Basel—Hostility of the Spanish theologians; Charles V uncertain, but supports Erasmus secretly—Condition of some monasteries at this time—The Reformation breaks loose in Basel and Erasmus goes to Freiburg-i-B— The question of the nullity of Henry VIII's marriage with Katherine—Melanchthon presents the Confession to the Diet at Augsburg; its moderation; its superiority over all other reformed formulæ—Charles V's increasing hostility to the Reformation: the edict of restoration and restitution—Erasmus's views on the situation—Erasmus in favour with Clement VII and with the King of the Romans —The schism in England caused by Clement's inability to declare the King's marriage null and the progress of heresy—Paul III succeeds to the throne of St. Peter; his wish to appoint Fisher and Erasmus Cardinals, a proof of his sincerity in the matter of reform—The judicial murder of Blessed Thomas More and Blessed John Fisher—The effect of their death upon Erasmus—His illness and death in Basel—His character and tastes; his strength and weakness . . . . . pp. 87–115

CHAPTER V

THE FRIENDS AND CORRESPONDENTS OF ERASMUS

Erasmus at Oxford—His editions of the Fathers, and not his New Testament nor his texts of the classics, his greatest achievement—His regard for the works of St. Thomas Aquinas—The *Moriæ Encomium*: the outcry in the universities which its appearance caused—Sir Thomas More's support of Greek—The struggle between *Greeks and Trojans* at Oxford—Polydore Vergil—The *Julius Exclusus*: a politico-religious squib; Erasmus the probable author—The *Colloquies*—The *Paraphrases* of the New Testament; to whom dedicated; the praise bestowed on them from suspect quarters; their drawbacks as literature for popular use—Erasmus's correspondents; their remarkable diversity; amongst them were included all the most famous men of the day—Minor correspondents: Lypsius, Meyer, Wildenauer, Kock; Louis de Berquin, a brilliant scholar; condemned by the Sorbonne; his tragical end—de Pins, Vives, Botzheim, intimates of Erasmus and staunch Catholics—Erasmus's work and influence—his undoubted Catholicity—Final reflections. . pp. 116–142

INDEX OF NAMES . . pp. 143, 144

Author's Preface

THE object of this small book is to set out in a popular, and it is hoped accurate manner, the life, works, and influence of one of the most remarkable men of his own or of any other time. The subject is so wide and intricate that Erasmus, within the limits allowed by this series, must be treated in a more or less inadequate manner, and his many-sided genius and character does not easily lend itself to condensation.

I have chiefly made use of the following works, besides a few others, to which reference is made in the text:

The Leiden edition of Erasmus's works, 1706.

Erasmus, his Life and Character shown in his Correspondence and Works. Drummond.

Oxford Reformers. Seebohm.

Ulrich von Hutten. Strauss. Leipzig, 1871.

Geschichte der Papste im Zeitalter der Renaissance. L. Pastor.

Life and Letters of Erasmus. J. A. Froude.

And, above all, up to 1520, the monumental edition of Erasmus's works and notes of his life by Mr. P. S. Allen, without which no writer on Erasmus could take many steps. My aim throughout has been to portray Erasmus as he really was; to depict his influence, which was small, on his own times, but far greater in more modern days, and to illustrate his character so that it may be more easy to understand how so brilliant a man and so learned a scholar, who never ceased to be Catholic, fell out of favour not only with Protestants, as was inevitable, but with those Catholics whom, as Dr. K. Hartfelder so eloquently observes, he had never ceased to serve, and whose religion was our own.

MAURICE WILKINSON.

OXFORD, *May* 1921.

Erasmus of Rotterdam

Chapter I

SOCIETY IN THE EARLY SIXTEENTH CENTURY

RASMUS was born at Rotterdam between the years 1465 and 1469. Dr. Richter and some other authorities have decided on 1466 as the most probable date. His own statements as to his birth are conflicting, but it took place during the night of October 27–28; Erasmus himself observed the day of St. Simon and St. Jude as his birthday. The name of the family was Gierrard, which by an obvious play on the word was Latinized into Desiderius and afterwards Graecized into Erasmus.

His birth is involved in some mystery, but the matter is of no very great importance. The dispensation of Julius II, 1506, describes him as being *de soluto genitus*, which is altogether against the

contemporary rumour of his being the son of a priest ; on the other hand, the more ample dispensation of Leo X, 1517, describes the defect of birth in far stronger terms. We know that Erasmus had an elder brother, Peter, for whom he had but little regard : so the connection between his parents must have lasted for a long time. When Erasmus became famous and made enemies, as was the way of Renaissance scholars, the more damaging version of his birth was probably circulated. Froude was inclined to doubt the whole business, but it is clear that Erasmus was in fact illegitimate, and that his father, a man of position and education, either by trickery or by accident, was prevented from marrying the mother.[1]

Erasmus was born on the edge of that extraordinary outburst of art, learning, and culture which had indeed already appeared in Italy, but did not attain its zenith until some twenty years later. He

[1] The *Compendium Vitae Erasmi* was published in 1607 by Paul Remba, Professor of History at Leiden. The information given in it is very important, its authenticity has been much disputed, but Mr. P. S. Allen, Oxford, accepts it as genuine.

was born at the death of one era and at the birth of another, an event which may be said to have influenced the ideas of education and the general outlook on life, until the disruption of Europe and of society which began with the present century and culminated in the recent war. The Renaissance was already in blossom in Italy, but it required the invasion of Charles VIII to scatter the seeds into the lands beyond the Alps. That invasion marks the beginning of modern history, and Addington Symonds, with his true instinct for the picturesque, describes the battle of Fornovo as the moment of the birth of the new world ; even as Goethe said of himself at Valmy that he had been present at the birth of a new order of things. Erasmus regarded with appreciation the names of Marsilio Ficino, Poliziano, and Pico della Mirandola ; he never, of course, knew any of them personally. These famous scholars, Florentine at least by domicile, were for long the admiration and inspiration of the learned world. Poliziano undoubtedly still enjoys a reputation, Ficino is un-

known except to the historian, and Pico lives not so much for his learning, which was confused if extensive, as for his beauty, his charm, his high birth, and sweet piety. Luther was not the first to astonish the world with theses and to invite attack. Pico wrote some hundreds, not ninety-five ; many were unorthodox, which he never seriously intended to maintain, some were absurd, and one at least, " that the soul knows nothing clearly and distinctly but itself," was extremely subtle, and in it some have seen the germ of the whole Cartesian theory.

As the Renaissance spread beyond Italy it took on different aspects and tended to abandon the purely artistic form of its original home. Italian learning was pretty, and the ways of the cultured Italians were most delightful, when not too scandalous. In France it took the form of literary exuberance, not necessarily of classical inspiration, and the building of those Renaissance *châteaux*, not *castles* in the mediaeval sense, which still give a characteristic charm to much of Northern and Central France and above all to the

Loire country. Still, the *motif* was very Italian ; the Court was italianate, though not to the extent which it reached after Erasmus's death. In the North, on the contrary, in the Empire—it is best to avoid the perfectly correct words *Germany* and *Austria*, for they have come to have a peculiar meaning to us since 1866—the Renaissance took literally the form of the revival of learning, albeit there existed an excellent Flemish, Dutch, and Nürnberg school of art. This scholarship was laborious ; it collated and purged the texts of the classical authors or of the early Fathers ; later, it took to Biblical criticism, and finally opened the flood-gates of the Reformation and was indirectly responsible for that great disaster to the human race. The Renaissance, as expounded in Italy and France, would not have led to that catastrophe, and we shall see that it was never the intention of scholars like Erasmus, still less of Colet, Warham, or More, that it should do so. This " high scholarship " never wrote in anything but Latin, though Erasmus did so far relax as to write to the

Elector of Saxony, Luther's friend, in German. It could be extremely dry and bitter in spirit, and even at its best was inclined to pedantry. It was not so human as in the southern forms of the Renaissance, though intensely humanistic. The Germans or Dutchmen lacked the *ingenia acerrima Florentina*, or the whole-hearted zest in life which characterized the sixteenth-century Frenchman. The Frenchman of the splendid Valois days and for long after was a very different person from the Frenchman of the third Republic. Not all northern scholars were pedantic ; there were many exceptions ; our own Colet, our subject Erasmus, and I think we may add Melanchthon, the only sympathetic character amongst the Reformers, were all delightfully human.

Such was the curious, complex yet immature society of which Erasmus was destined for long to be the arbiter, courted by all from the Pope and Emperor downwards. Many of the distinguished friends of his zenith turned against him, for several of them subsequently joined the Wittenberg camp, and Erasmus never wavered in his

Catholicism. Many who attached themselves over-rigidly to the past forsook him, for Erasmus would never be partisan of a blind obscurantism. He was alive to the undoubted abuses of the time, and was troubled by them to some extent: it is a tragedy that he was unable to see the end of the Council of Trent, for the decrees of that Council aimed at the reformation of every one of the real abuses of which the earlier reformers had complained. However, the reformation movement fell entirely out of the control of those who would have helped the Pope to salutary reforms which, indeed, came, but too late to save the unity of Europe, and by some disastrous agency fell into the power of such as Luther, Calvin, Knox, Thomas Cromwell, and Henry VIII.

The sixteenth century was a time of violent emotions; people wore their hearts on their sleeves, and expressed themselves habitually in superlatives. It was a time of extreme intellectualism; an intellectualism which was not incompatible with gross superstition—I mean the belief in astrology and magic. It was very

pagan ; men of letters were so saturated with classical learning that in some curious way they seemed to be living in the days of the Empire before Our Lord, and the more austere even in the days of the Republic. How much of this was a pure mannerism it is hard to say. Luigi da Porto seems haunted by a series of portents in the vicissitudes of Venetian history, which he described in his admirable letters, and by a semi-personal *Fortuna arbitra delle cose umane*. He probably meant little by it, but regarded it as necessary for a man of culture, or at any rate as a sign of being in good society, to imitate Livy, whom he had obviously chosen as his literary model. In fact, these men were convinced that the centuries which followed the break-up of the Roman Empire, which we usually call the Middle Ages, were a time of unmitigated ignorance and gloom, and deserved nothing but oblivion. We know how mistaken that view is, but Mr. Chesterton says somewhere that a "discovery is an incurable disease," and all discoveries, whether the revival of letters of four hundred years ago

or the discoveries of science of our own time, have in turn left the world blind and deaf to other and more important matters.

The present day is equally pagan and materialistic with the sixteenth century, with its grossness and cruelty, and with much hypocrisy thrown in ; it wholly lacks its charm and brilliancy, and is equally at the mercy of absurd superstitions. Does not Goethe say, " Where no God is there spectres reign " ? We are very near the sixteenth century in some ways and far removed from its thoughts in others. If we could converse with an educated man of that time we should meet on fairly common ground, whereas we should find difficulty in understanding the mental outlook of a man of the twelfth century. The reason is that the great political and even economic problems of our day date from the Renaissance time: modern individualism and nationalism are definitely opposed to the more corporate life of the Middle Ages. Our modern troubles and problems and manner of thought would be wholly unintelligible to a person of the centuries before the

fifteenth and sixteenth, for the reason that he would know nothing of the Renaissance or Reformation, and the whole of modern Europe would appear to him to be a hopeless nightmare. He could not even be got to understand the events of the sixteenth century simply as historical facts, and so far as he could be made to comprehend the vast change which was then made he would dislike it intensely. In the matter of science and inventions the gulf between our own times and the sixteenth century is profound, but not very much wider than that which divides the Europe of 1920 from the Europe of 1820 ; nay, we may take a much shorter period of time, for the difference even between 1920 and 1895 can hardly be exaggerated. There are periods in history when vast changes are consummated in a relatively short time, after perhaps centuries of apparent stability, and the sixteenth century was pre-eminently such a time. The changes which took place between the two first decades and the three last were fateful to the human race, and were kaleidoscopic in nature. The mind is bewildered

in the attempt to follow them : we know what ultimately happened in the different countries ; but what must have been the bewilderment of mind of those who lived through them ! The change in our own times is momentous, but is after all merely one materialism against another ; but the upheaval in the sixteenth century was centred round matters spiritual, the very heart of any real existence. There were the doctrines and discipline of the Church, unchallenged seriously since the extirpation of early heresies, now flung into the melting-pot and being recast in the most unfamiliar and extravagant forms. People did not really understand what was taking place, and nothing seemed in the least likely to be permanent.

This fact explains the hesitation and apparent opportunism of many excellent people ; all their ideas were in suspense, and at the back of their minds was the hope, and probably the belief, that in the course of a few years Europe would return to the old paths. The Reformation, which, we must not forget, was a phase of the Renaissance, resembled Meno's torpedo-

fish, and had a numbing effect on those who came most into contact with it. The Reformation, as it took place as an historical fact, would not have come to pass without the Renaissance. There was no necessary link between, say, Poliziano and Calvin ; but the renewed study of Greek and Hebrew led insensibly to Biblical criticism, and the inherent scepticism of the whole Renaissance spirit was ever ready to act like a powerful solvent on all hitherto accepted tenets, whether of Church or State. Unfortunately, these emancipated minds, rejoicing in their new-found vigour, refused to see any good in the preceding centuries, and the scholastic philosophy became their special target. It is true that scholasticism, like much else, was degenerate at the time of the breaking of the storm, and unfortunately until very recently the philosophy of the schoolmen has lain under a heavy cloud of ignorance and contempt. In this mental attitude even the choicest spirits, including Erasmus and Colet, were involved. Men usually end by disliking what they cannot understand or misconceive. The study of

Erasmus and the Renaissance is of such high importance, not because the new world was in any way essentially better than the old, but because, whether we like it or no, in that century took place the birth of the modern, our own period. Mediaevally minded men exist, and have always existed, who are the most spiritual and frequently the most delightful of mortals, and a mediaevalist revival is quite a probable occurrence ; but the inspiration of most who are not mere utilitarians even at the present day is derived from the Renaissance. This type, which has long held the field of intellect, has now for years past, at least twenty, been fighting a losing battle against the encroachments of science and inventions, in a word, utilitarianism.

The influence of the Renaissance did not make for spirituality, but it did stand for learning and beauty as ends in themselves without the ulterior motives of helping people to get a living, to marry soon, to amass wealth, and the various other objects at which education now aims. Education ought to be perfectly useless in the worldly or, more precisely, materialistic sense.

The pure intellectualism of the Renaissance spirit is a far higher thing, but very low and unimportant as compared with the spiritual life. The spirit of the Renaissance was aristocratic, individualist, and to some extent selfish. A certain amount of money to ensure leisure for study was regarded as a necessity ; hence the begging letters of scholars and their anxiety to find a patron. After all, it is a fact that a really cultured life cannot be attained by those whose whole energies have to be absorbed in obtaining the necessaries of life or in amassing wealth. People can, of course, be very rich and prosperous and yet be wholly devoid of culture—such is, indeed, their more usual condition ; but still, a person wholly engaged in a struggle for existence has a less good chance. In other words a certain amount of money, enough to guarantee a certain independence of action, though not to render hard work unnecessary, is the happiest condition for a man who desires to use his intellect.

The kind of life and manner of thought amongst the great or eminent in the sixteenth century is fairly easy to under-

stand from the multiplicity of letters and memoirs which are extant. About the mass of the folk we really know very little. The idea of education, in our sense of giving a certain modicum of culture and learning to the whole population, did not exist even during that learned century. Nevertheless, education—that is, a literary training (nothing else could be imagined) —did begin to have some effect and to mould the minds of the younger townsfolk. It was not before another three centuries, perhaps more, had elapsed that education in any real sense could be said to have permeated the country districts. We must, therefore, picture during the second and third decade of the sixteenth century a society composed of the aristocracy of birth much affected by the New Learning, and a rapidly rising plutocracy of commerce and finance ; this also was interested in and patronized the things of the mind. Below these two existed a mass of agricultural folk and artisans and many who subsequently came to be known as the small middle classes. This table of society requires modification for different

countries. In Italy the class distinctions were never very deep. The aristocracy of intellect was there supreme. Pico, of high birth, would mix freely and happily with a Scala or a Pucci.

Within the confines of the Empire there was a great gulf between " the high and well born " and the burgher class, although the leaders of finance, such as the Fuggers, were beginning to get a footing in the lower circles of the mighty. These were frequently highly cultured and good patrons of art and learning. Amongst the former there was a great diversity ; many were still mere feudal men-at-arms, but some were deeply affected by the Renaissance, more especially the South Germans, and pre-eminent amongst them the amazing Ulrich von Hutten. Outside the Free and Imperial cities there was a great dumb collection of peasants, inured to hardship and tyranny of all kinds, boorish, and mainly occupied with their material needs, but not without some of the innate German idealism and kindliness. Throughout Germany there existed a latent nationalism which was quick to respond to Luther's

appeal, and a vast discontent which manifested itself in the Peasants' Revolt.

In France the Renaissance was more purely aristocratic in spirit; it basked in the sunshine of the Court and in the *châteaux* of the great; it flourished in the French universities, and was greatly encouraged and patronised by French Churchmen. These, let us remember, were almost invariably members of the aristocracy. The feudal aristocracy of France did not lose its power until the time of Richelieu. The country at large, as was natural for the most conservative of lands, continued in the old ways and was but little stirred by the Renaissance; it hated the Reformation, when it arrived, with a fierce and lasting hatred.

Society in England was something of an amalgam of these three; but the feudal aristocracy was unfortunately far weaker than it was in France or in the Empire, and the new aristocracy, invented by the Tudors, was for the most part of a singularly abject and servile character. In the Court and travelled circles foreign fashions were in vogue and society was materialistic

in outlook. The country, from being one of the weakest of European Powers, was gradually realizing its potential strength, and a spirit of capable and fierce insularity was rapidly developing. The mass of the folk were boorish, conservative, and but little interested in intellectual matters; to give them due credit, they were very little inclined to follow the path of religious innovation. This was imposed on them from above.

Such was, quite generally, the condition of Europe at the time when the Renaissance attained its full development, and in England, Germany, and the Netherlands was about to emerge into the Reformation. So much is necessary to understand how it came to pass that the Reformation was able to spread with the rapidity of a prairie fire. The times were favourable to religious revolution, even as many suppose our own days are ripe for social revolution. A fastidious and somewhat artificial culture with the encouragement of a sceptical spirit, the rise of a sentiment of nationality everywhere, the prevalence of abuses and corruption in

many quarters, and the existence of a vague discontent would have rendered some upheaval of society probable. As it was the period was too near to the Middle Ages for the revolt to take the form of anything but religious troubles.

The sixteenth century was singularly secular and irreligious, but intensely theological. The state of things in Erasmus's time might explain, though not excuse, the German revolt. All the matters which troubled the early reformers were rectified, made clear, or abolished at Trent, and there was left no *abuse*, unless of course anyone will maintain, as some no doubt do, that Catholicism is in itself an abuse. People are coming round to the idea that the Reformation was a phase of thought. Even those who consider—wrongly we think—that the Reformation was a necessity at the time, frequently admit that it is futile to continue to protest against matters which have long ceased to have importance except as facts of history. It is useless to go on praising deaf gods for ever.

Chapter II

THE YOUTH AND MATURITY OF ERASMUS

ERASMUS was slight and fair, and in his youth was delicate and pleasing to look at. The pictures extant of him in later life portray a rather emaciated and refined face. He suffered from ill health all his life, a kind of acute indigestion it would seem, and in considering some of his writings and the bitter spirit which he showed at times —a symptom often due to an extreme sensitiveness—we must remember that chronic ill health does not improve the temper of most men. He went to school first at Gouda and then to the choir school of Utrecht. In 1475 he was under the instruction of the Brethren of the Common Life at Deventer ; he seems to have been at Hertogenbosch in 1484, but little is known of his life at that period. His parents were now both dead, and under the pressure of his guardians, who did not

fulfil their responsibilities in a proper manner, both he and his brother, Peter, entered the Augustinian priory of Steyn on probation. His brother is of no consequence to us: he was a weak and sensual character, and although he entered the monastic life much more willingly than Erasmus, he abandoned it and died discredited. Erasmus, on the contrary, although he was dispensed from his vows as an Augustinian canon, never did anything unbecoming his orders. Erasmus was ordained priest by the Bishop of Utrecht and celebrated his first Mass in 1492. The manner in which the brothers, and it is to be feared many immature youths, were professed at that time was an undoubted abuse, for they were induced to take orders by a mixture of cajolery and threats. No one was more shocked than Leo X himself at the manner in which Erasmus's profession had been made. It was one of Erasmus's many services to the Church to make known some of the abuses connected with the various orders. All these abuses, wholly contrary to the Canon Law in any case, were made impossible for

the future at the Council of Trent. Erasmus was most careful not to condemn the religious as such ; he merely stated that he had no vocation, and wished, now that he was a power in the world, to protest against a state of things which made his profession, and that of many others, not only useless but a source of real spiritual danger to those who undertook lightly vows which they would very likely abandon improperly. It is a view which would pass as a commonplace now and for very long past, but is an instance of the spirit which seems to bring Erasmus much nearer to our own times. Furthermore, the Low Countries were inhabited by a somewhat gross people, and it is very probable that Erasmus's strictures on the religious orders and houses were coloured by the life of his native land ; he frequently refers to the lack of culture and learning in the Netherlands of his day. So we may be prepared to accept as true abuses which might be related concerning the religious in the Low Countries when we should reject them if reported elsewhere. Erasmus's health was totally unable

to stand the life of the priory, and the lack of culture of some of the canons displeased him, so the prior, who realized the extraordinary talent of the youth—for Erasmus had ample leisure to study in the library of Steyn, whatever may otherwise have been its drawbacks—arranged with Henry of Bergen, Bishop of Cambrai, to accept Erasmus as his secretary. The dispensation to abandon the monastic life was easily obtained from the Vatican. The bishop himself was a secular, and in any case had no jurisdiction over the orders, so, besides performing a kind act, he may have taken some human pleasure in withdrawing Erasmus from the control of men who were outside his authority. These early years of Erasmus's life are not really important except so far as they gave a bias to the whole of his subsequent life.

There are many gaps in the earlier history of Erasmus's life. We do not know at what age he left Steyn, nor for how long he was in the bishop's service, but soon enough he found the conditions irksome. Erasmus was not too grateful for the kindness of Henry of Bergen. Very likely

the bishop was rather tiresome to so mercurial a nature ; but our scholar, like everyone else, had many faults. He was opposed to restraint of all kinds and was distinctly exacting, and at times ungrateful. At any rate, the bishop agreed to his going to study at the University of Paris. His doings there seem to have been no more than the tricks of all undergraduates, yet not wholly suitable to a priest, and the Bishop of Cambrai took alarm at what he had heard. Erasmus was not immaculate, but he was never anything approaching to being vicious, and never did anything really base ; as a priest he ought to have avoided the society of women, and as a matter of fact they do not seem to have had any attraction for him except perhaps in his young days during his first visit to England. Servatius Rogerus of the Augustinians, and ultimately Prior of Steyn, was the person on whom he lavished his affection—a clear proof that his time at the priory was not wholly miserable. Anne Bersala of Tournehem had an attraction for him, but simply as a patron of scholars and learning whose

financial help the impecunious and lavish Erasmus found extremely useful. In Paris he prospered and his lecture-room was well attended, and here he made the acquaintance of William Blount, Lord Mountjoy's eldest son, memorable as the occasion of his introduction to England, and Grey,[1] son of the Marquis of Dorset. It is remarkable that his pupils almost invariably grew to be his friends. Erasmus had a strong capacity for arousing and bestowing affection ; he had also a knack of arousing animosity ; the two are by no means so incompatible as they seem. In Paris after a time Erasmus fell into the depression to which he was always subject, and Mountjoy thereupon invited him to try his fortunes in England and return with himself to London. One of the more prevalent delusions is the idea that foreign travel is a very modern idea. It is true that our grandfathers were essentially sedentary and untravelled ; that was in part the effect of the Napoleonic wars ; but

[1] But it would seem that this Grey was illegitimate, as he cannot be identified. He was under the care of a sort of English agent in Paris, who did not wholly approve of Erasmus. Grey was with Erasmus at Basel in 1525.

at Erasmus's time and even through the Middle Ages, people got about with surprising speed and comparative ease. Latin was the recognized tongue, so the trouble of foreign languages hardly arose, at any rate, in the intercourse of the cultured ; and the ordinary folk did not travel.

The Catholic Church, as yet unassailed, was the common home of every person of every nationality ; for practical purposes we may at this period ignore Russia and the Near East. One of the more disastrous results of the Reformation was the destruction of the spirit of Catholicity in a racial apart from the theological sense, and the settling up of the personified State, the ideal of nationalism, and, in the case of England, the creation of a spirit of self-satisfaction and insularity. Mr. Chesterton well says that it is a " great downfall from being a Christian nation to becoming a chosen people." The English, forced by nature to be islanders, must ever have been less cosmopolitan than the other Catholics of Europe ; but the insularity which we know too well and from which the choicer

spirits are indeed free is the product of the Reformation. Now Erasmus was nothing if not a cosmopolitan. Legally, he was of course a subject of the Emperor.

The dates of Erasmus's movements, which can only be determined from his letters, the earlier of which are singularly inaccurate, though Mr. Allen has reduced to order the hitherto prevailing chaos, are uncertain. Erasmus probably did not trouble to be accurate, because he could not in his early days foresee the eagerness with which his ordinary correspondence would be studied three hundred and fifty years later. He was in London quite at the close of the century. Here he made the acquaintance of Sir Thomas More, Colet, Warham, not yet Archbishop of Canterbury, and Grocyn, who was heading a forlorn attempt to teach Greek at Oxford without any grammars. It was probably because of this lack of facilities for the study of Greek that he chose to decline Colet's invitation to Oxford. His visit to that university was considerably later. Erasmus may have learned the rudiments of Greek in his school days ; anyhow, at

Louvain, in 1502, he was fluent in the language, and in England during the Cambridge period (1505–6) he was master of it for all purposes. His friendship with these men, and especially with the two first, was lifelong.

Erasmus described the extraordinary charm of More, and he probably loved him better than any other person. The friendship of Blessed Thomas More is in itself a guarantee of the worth of Erasmus. His desire, however, was now set on Italy, and he left England in 1499, when occurred the well-known episode of the seizure of all or nearly all his money at Dover, because the export of specie was forbidden by an old statute of Edward III and apparently reinforced by one of the actual reign (Henry VII). More misled Erasmus unintentionally by telling him that the embargo did not extend to foreign coin ; Erasmus's money seems to have been French. This made a bad impression on Erasmus, though the volume of the *Adagia* almost immediately appeared. This is a collection of thoughts, quotations, epigrams and reflections. This form of

light literature was practically unknown in those days.

It served Erasmus well and pleased all his English friends, and from its appearance dates the patronage of Warham. The prelate for the first time realized the supreme genius of the young Dutchman. The *Adagia* was well timed, for something now was expected of Erasmus, and an attack on England, to which doubtless he felt inclined and could certainly have written in a telling manner, would not have helped him with his English friends. All the same, the virtual robbery at Dover did rankle, and he never again thought so well of England. Erasmus was not a mere scholar, though he worked extraordinarily hard. He mixed with men and women of all sorts and of all stations in life in most countries, continually studying human nature in all its aspects. This was, in fact, his real interest, and it is this humanity which gives their charm to so many of his letters. He never seems to have been troubled by abstract questions as to human destiny and the mystery of human life, its reason and purpose, and at

times its apparent purposelessness. "I am alive, and my faculties are trustworthy," was never said by Erasmus; but he would have appreciated its philosophy. No doubt these questions trouble the minds of many who spiritually are greatly Erasmus's superiors; but very often they are but the imagination of a shallow and undisciplined intellect, of those who will not or possibly cannot exercise their wills. A very hard life was not possible to Erasmus, and certain comforts, or rather refinements, of living were to him a necessity; his material wants were small, but fastidious. With the idea of an Italian voyage in his head, he set to work to find the means for realizing it, and we could wish that he had adopted other methods.

He applied to his old friend the bishop and to his brother, the Abbot of St. Bertin; but, in spite of his flattery, not to much avail. It is most difficult to re-establish relations with one who has once been kind and who, rightly or wrongly, has become subsequently estranged. That is one of the tragedies of life, and as time rolled on Erasmus frequently experienced it. By

no means was it always his fault, but very frequently it was the result of refusing to follow those whom he liked into dangerous paths. Erasmus's conceit in his letters to the lady of Tournehem and to James Batt, in which he states that the like of himself only appears once in centuries, and that he is composing works that will live for ever, is unpleasant ; but it was the fashion of the learned world of that time to speak in superlatives. The same claim has been made, and justified, by Horace and Shakespeare. Further adulation of Anne Bersala produced the desired result, but the Bishop of Cambrai remained obdurate, for which we must rather admire him. It is strange that Erasmus would not accept ecclesiastical patronage, which could easily have been obtained ; it was the ordinary method of rewarding scholarship, and the Churchmen, from the Pope downwards, were splendid patrons of the arts and letters ; but Erasmus would not sacrifice his independence of thought and originality of method. He always had certain principles !

For some reason Erasmus did not set

out at once for Italy, for we find him again in England at Lambeth, 1502, and it was not before 1504 that he went to Bologna and was introduced to Julius II. This great Pope was full of his projects for the expulsion of the French and the curtailment of the power of Venice, in both of which he was successful. But Erasmus was a life-long pacificist; he heartily disliked all wars, in which he was greatly in advance of his day, and he spoiled his chances with Julius by not writing in his best style on the aims and objects of the Pontiff. Julius II has been much maligned over his French wars by Erasmus—if indeed he wrote the *Julius Exclusus*, which we must consider in due course. To turn the French out of Italy was a laudable act, quite as much so as the expulsion of the English from France about seventy years earlier. In Rome Erasmus had the best of receptions, and made the permanent friendship of the Cardinal of San Giorgio and won the regard of the future Leo X. He left Rome and returned to Paris, and thence made his third visit to England, when he stayed some time at

Cambridge (1505–6). He may have been attracted by the new foundation of the Lady Margaret's college of Corpus Christi, and some have even seen his humanistic influence in the statutes drawn up for that college by the future martyr, Bishop Fisher. However that may be, Erasmus applied for admission to the doctorate of divinity. He stayed some time in Cambridge and lectured there ; the climate and living he found most trying, for Erasmus, though of a hardy northern race, was in tastes and habits purely southern. He had not yet attained to any fame in England, and a lecturer at a university was not nearly so important a person as a lecturer and tutor of the present day. Rome again attracted him, and he would probably have settled there for good with the patronage of San Giorgio but for events which took place in England. It seems strange that anyone so cultured and so fond of learned ease as Erasmus should have been attracted to England at all. A southern land suited him far better—not that Rome was a sanatorium in those days. To remain in Rome, the centre of learning,

and where the patronage of Popes such as Julius II or Leo X was magnificent, apparently had every advantage over our island ; we can only suppose that Erasmus could not make up his mind to sacrifice his independence, which would have been necessary if he were to rely entirely on the patronage of the Papal Court. In any case two letters came, one from his old friend William Blount, now Lord Mountjoy, to announce the accession of Henry VIII, and another, an enclosure from the young monarch himself, both of them expressed in the most friendly and even flattering language. Erasmus, not without cause, hastened to the English Court. The hope and its fulfilment turned out in fact to be widely different, and Erasmus was bitterly disappointed at the result. This was not altogether mere fickleness on his royal and noble friends' part. The form of the invitation makes us suppose that some very high post, possibly one on the Council, was intended for Erasmus ; for he was now well known, a friend of Cardinals, and with an assured position at Rome as the editor of a fresh

translation of the New Testament, if he cared to remain. The failure of Henry's promises was due mainly to his preoccupations in the political world. The administration required reform, Ireland was very uneasy, and a war with France was imminent. The protection of Erasmus, therefore, passed into Warham's hands, to be continued by Cranmer. The only obvious way of providing for a scholar then was to give him a benefice ; accordingly, it came to pass that Erasmus for a short time figured amongst the English parochial clergy, as rector of Aldington, Kent. The living was a valuable one, but Erasmus held it (1512) only for a short time, and there is no reason to suppose that he ever resided there. When he resigned Warham allowed him a yearly pension of £20 ; but the archbishop expressly stated that the granting of pensions was not his habit, nor were they suitable, except in such exceptional circumstances as in the case of Erasmus.[1] Erasmus's disappointment

[1] "Viri in literis et Latinis et Graecis consummatissimi, qui tempora nostra sua doctrina ac facundia velut sydus illustrant et singularis Erasmus qui, spreta Italia, Gallia et Germania quibus in regionibus licuit illi satis opulente

is clearly shown in a letter to Cardinal Grimani.

"I was promised much gold, and although I am careless of money, I expected a stream fuller of it than Pactolus itself. I do regret leaving Rome. Rome is the centre of the world. In Rome is liberty. In Rome are splendid libraries. In Rome we meet and converse with men of learning; there are the ancient monuments, and on Rome the eyes of the world are fastened; there are the Cardinals who were so kind to me, not least of them yourself."

These were true words. He found no fault with the young King, whom he admitted was kindness itself, still less with Warham's generosity, but rather blamed the war as the cause of his ill luck. We

vitam agere, huc (i.e. in Angliam) se conferre maluit ut hic cum amicis quod reliquum est vitae traduceret."

There are men extremely able in Latin and Greek letters who illuminate our times with their learning and eloquence, and above all Erasmus, who, rejecting Italy, France and the Empire, lands in which he could have lived most comfortably, preferred to come hither (i.e. England), and here, amongst his friends, to spend the rest of his life.

This is a figure of speech, for Erasmus at this date was not old, and he lived for years after.

Erasmus was without any knowledge of the English language.

must remember that Henry in his youth was attractive, very different from the lustful and blood-stained monster of his later years. Erasmus had strong prejudices and was no philosopher, and the annoyance caused him by the war accentuated his ingrained pacificism. He had abundant leisure, if nothing else, and travelled about the country. He made the pilgrimage to Walsingham in the company, probably, of the Eton boy Aldrich, and to Canterbury with Gratianus Pullus (Colet).

The *Peregrinatio Religionis* was not written before 1524; but the pilgrimage to St. Thomas must have taken place before 1519, the year of Colet's death, and that to Our Lady of Walsingham about the same time. The original form was watered down and the apology for rash vows is nearly as long. Erasmus was becoming more conservative. The words put into the mouth of the Blessed Virgin are of the highest wisdom. Downright unbecoming requests to her and to the saints were apparently often made and endless foolish ones. The latter we can easily believe, incredible as the former seem to our

minds ; but the age was ignorant—that is, the bulk of the folk—and superstitious. The whole *Peregrinatio* is a curious work, at times flippant and at times excellent, as in the answer of Ogygius, the believing pilgrim, to Mercedemus, the sceptic, who enquires how the Blessed Virgin most delights to be honoured, that the most acceptable service is to imitate her. We must bear in mind that the familiarity with which the men of the Renaissance treated holy things, though unpleasant to ourselves, was not necessarily at all irreverent.

Erasmus's essential orthodoxy is triumphantly vindicated by his Greek votive verses to Our Lady which he put up at the Walsingham shrine, and which, in a delightful spirit of mischief, he certainly wrote in Greek for the mystification of the clergy of the shrine.

> Hail, Jesu's Mother, blessed evermore,
> Alone of women God bearing and Virgin,
> Others may offer to Thee various gifts,
> This man his gold, that man silver,
> A third adorn Thy shrine with precious stones :
> For which some ask a guerdon of good health,
> Some riches ; others hope that by Thy aid
> They soon may bear a father's honoured name,
> Or gain the years of Pylus' revered sage.

But the poor scholar, for his well-meant song,
Bringing these verses only, all he has,
Asks in reward for his most humble gift
That greatest blessing, piety of heart,
And free remission of his many sins.
The Vow of Erasmus.

We need add nothing to it.

After the pilgrimage Erasmus stayed with More at Chelsea.

His word portraits of these two, More and Colet, are remarkable, but so extremely familiar to all that we must not enlarge upon them. That portrait of Blessed Thomas More is of special interest in that it was painted for Ulrich von Hutten. Their quarrel was of a much later date. The *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum* had appeared and, strange as it may seem, More was quite delighted at this virulent caricature of the monks. We should reflect that these early skits did not in themselves attack the doctrines of the Church, to attacks on which, however, they doubtless led the way. We know the subsequent events ; so that we forget that those who had lived in the Church, and, since the conversion of the English, without the bare possibility of a breaking from it

ever occurring to them, could not have had the faintest idea of what was coming within a few years. Erasmus, on the contrary, to whom the authorship was maliciously assigned, was disgusted at its indecency and said that he did not take the slightest interest in it. Yet there can be no doubt as to More's essentially religious nature and his great spiritual superiority to Erasmus.

Erasmus's expenses in printing his St. Jerome and for his work on the New Testament were heavy, and the promised money was not forthcoming, not at least in the quantity for which he had hoped. We soon find him again at Cambridge, whither perhaps Blessed John Fisher, now Chancellor of the University, had invited him. His letters from Cambridge give us a good idea of how he passed the time and what he thought. He evidently did not not care much for it, and had no intention of staying there. His health was bad, partly owing to the poor quality of the wine—he could not drink beer, as he complained to his friend Ammonius, a Papal Agent in England, and to Warham.

The plague broke out and emptied the university. Most curiously we get no account of the famous men whose acquaintance he must have made. To a man of his temperament a residence in Cambridge must have been depressing; he was a Dutchman only by accident of birth, and he longed more and more for the Italian sunniness of life and manners. In the sixteenth century the climate of Cambridge, in the winter months, must have been most unattractive.

Now came the period of Erasmus's glory, with the appearance of the Greek New Testament with a new Latin translation and a preface to each Gospel and Epistle. This was carried out with the direct approval and help of Leo X himself. The book did not indeed appear until after Erasmus's departure from England, but it belongs to this period of his life. Efforts were made on the part of many of his English friends to detain him, sincere doubtless on the part of the Bishop of Rochester and of Warham, insincere on the part of Wolsey, who never was attracted by Erasmus. Even the King seemed anxious to retain

in his realm the most distinguished scholar of the day; but Erasmus was resolved to depart. He was destined never again to see England, although in later life, as we shall see, he made a determined effort to return. Before leaving he passed a fortnight with Fisher at Rochester and thither also went Sir Thomas More. For posterity, the most important result of this meeting was the production of the *Encomium Moriae* which has a play on the name, More, besides its literal meaning, the Praise of Folly. This was the last meeting of the three devoted friends: none but the sunniest worldly prospects could then be foreseen for the eminent statesman, the eminent churchman, and the famous scholar. *Dis aliter visum.* Two were to gain the crown of martyrdom, the other's sun sank in loneliness and gloom.

Chapter III

HIS ZENITH AND THE BEGINNINGS OF PROTESTANTISM

HE Imperial authorities represented in the Court at Brussels had meanwhile become alive to the importance of their subject: Erasmus had already attempted some indirect overtures to Maximilian, and thither he had to repair. On the way he stayed a short time with Mountjoy, the governor of Hammes, in the Pale of Calais. It was here that the whole question of his dispensation, which the Bishop of Cambrai had obtained for him twenty years ago, became again embarrassing. Probably he had overstepped the scope of Julius's dispensation, which perhaps was only strictly valid for Italy. At this time the old object of his devotion, Servatius, now Prior of Steyn, wrote to him asking many questions and inviting him to return to the priory. The reply of Erasmus to this letter is most important, for in it are set out all his

objections to the conventual life and other more intimate matters. Erasmus insisted on his physical limitations: "Jejuniorum semper impatiens fui . . . semel excitatus e somno nunquam potui redormiscere," [1] and so on. Not very weighty reasons these; but in some cases the difficulty may be insuperable. "Tam varia," he proceeds, "est hominum sententia et suus cuique avium cantus ut omnibus satisfieri non possit." [2] He is on more solid ground when he speaks of the pressure brought to bear on him before he took the vows, and meets the objection as to the years of probation by the remark, "What can a boy of seventeen know of his own mind?" and insists on the fact that letters had always been his real interest. He must have been speaking generally of the abuse of too youthful profession; for in his own case, although we do not know the year, it is certain that Erasmus was some way past seventeen. He speaks of his temperate habits. "Crapulam et ebrieta-

[1] "My constitution was always upset by fasting, and when I was aroused from sleep could never fall asleep again."

[2] "So different are the types of men, just as each bird has its own note, that it is impossible to satisfy everyone."

tem semper horrui fugique." [1] We need not suppose that the Dutch monks were drunkards, but they were Dutchmen as well as monks ; the folk of the Low Countries had some reputation for the absorption of liquor, and on festivals they probably drank too much for Erasmus's fastidious taste. Erasmus further lamented : " Voluptatibus etsi quondam fui inclinatus Veneri nunquam servivi." [2] He instanced all the Cardinals and the Pope who were ready to receive him as a brother : the inference seems to be that he was now too important a person to be a mere Augustinian Canon, and the same idea probably caused him to give up his lectures at Cambridge.

Finally, he wrote that if he thought that he could conscientiously return to Steyn he would set out that very day, and the rather sad salutation followed : " Bene vale quondam sodalis suavissime

[1] " I ever had a horror of excess and drunkenness, and fled from them."

[2] " Although at one time I was inclined to an excessive affection, I was not its slave, and to Venus I was never in bondage." Erasmus seems to be referring to some intimate matter of which only he and Servatius knew the history.

nunc pater observande." [1] It is pleasant to think that the friends of early days did not finally quarrel.

Erasmus, therefore, appealed through his friend Ammonius [2] for a complete dispensation to free him from any danger of his being forcibly returned to Steyn. He wrote an appeal on behalf of a fictitious youth, Florence, whose history and troubles were his own ; this was addressed to the protonotary, who was given the wholly imaginary name of Lambertus Grunnius. The Pope sent two replies, one to Ammonius absolving someone from all breaches of ecclesiastical law and authorizing him to live in the world and hold benefices in spite of illegitimacy ; the other was to Erasmus himself, granting a general dispensation, without reference to his order or illegitimacy, and em-

[1] "A fond good-bye, my erstwhile sweetest companion, and now my esteemed father."

[2] Andrea Ammonio of Lucca, Apostolic Notary and Collector. More prized him and lamented his death from the sweating sickness (1517). He was Latin Secretary to Henry VIII, and a Canon of Westminster. He is said to have been Nuncio shortly before his death ; but this would seem to be erroneous, since Cardinal Chieregato was Nuncio 1516.

powering him to hold benefices of a certain nature and value. Erasmus's really strong point was the manner in which he had been forced into the order. The rest of his arguments are less convincing. Hard cases of mistaken vocation have arisen, like hard matrimonial cases, but these are no argument for divorce ; no one need marry, no one need enter an order ; badly conducted monasteries in those days did exist, and in the early part of the sixteenth century it is, I suppose, generally admitted that the religious life was not seen at its best. At Brussels Erasmus found the Archduke Charles, whose chancellor informed him that a diocese in Sicily was at his disposal. He did not feel inclined for the charge ; but still it was a sign of the spirit of reasonable reform which we see afterwards at Trent, that, in spite of clamours, neither Pope nor archduke intended to give in to the enemies of Erasmus—that is to say, to the purely obscurantist section.

In the midst of all this came the Reuchlin controversy (1514). Reuchlin's knowledge of Hebrew was neither accurate nor profound, but its mere study was regarded

with suspicion ; at least it was generally thought that no Hebrew books other than the Old Testament should be tolerated. The *Augenspiel* had been burnt at Köln in February 1514, according to an edict of Maximilian against Jewish books (1510). This edict had hitherto lain dormant. The Dominicans restarted the trouble by denouncing Reuchlin to the Inquisition on account of some of his writings. Reuchlin was imprisoned and the whole matter referred to the Pope. The Papal Commission, in 1516, found in favour of Reuchlin : at the request of the Dominican, Hochstrat, Leo postponed action ; but, in 1520, judgement was given against the writings of Reuchlin. By that date the question had ceased to have a great importance, as the upheaval of the Reformation overpowered all minor matters. Erasmus strongly supported Reuchlin [1] in the cause of learning and wrote on the subject to his friend San Giorgio. In the

[1] The Reuchlin controversy was keenly followed in England. His supporters included such famous men as Grocyn ; the Chancellor of Canterbury ; Linacre, the well-known physician ; W. Latimer, fellow of All Souls, friend of More, and tutor to R. Pole ; Colet, More, and Ammonius.

defence of pure learning Erasmus showed a zeal which he never showed for the so-called reformers: scholarship was his own field, not the propagation of heresy. He wrote to Pirkheimer on the matter, in which he stated that His Holiness himself seemed afraid of the friars, and described Pfefferkorn,[1] Reuchlin's bitterest opponent, in the most satirical manner. Erasmus, however, was alive to the peril of the study, or rather of the exclusive study, of Greek, and foresaw a possibly worse danger in the revival of Hebrew; he was no pagan, still less a Judaizer. Meanwhile, Erasmus finished his *St. Jerome*, which he dedicated to Leo X, to whom he owed so much (1515), and received a letter of thanks written in the friendliest possible spirit. Leo avowed himself our scholar's special patron, and recommended him to Henry VIII for a bishopric. Leo was indeed a splendid patron of art and learning, as became a member of that illustrious family, and posterity owes a great debt to that Pontiff. The charge of obscurantism, so frequently levelled at the

[1] This man was a converted Jew.

Roman Curia, is a strange one: of all patrons of art and learning, the Renaissance Popes were the most magnificent; they could not be expected to favour heresy. The same critics will assail the Curia for the contrary reason: that it was too pagan in spirit, too much devoted to the arts and learning, and not sufficiently spiritual. It is impossible to maintain these two charges at the same time. The objection is rather similar to that of the Pharisees against our Lord and St. John the Baptist. In reality there was at least an alternation, for if a Pope like Leo was rather more sovereign in character than priest, his successor, Adrian VI, was a wholly spiritual man.

Reform was now very much in the air until all was spoiled by Luther's violence, and the reforms which were carried through at Trent might have been anticipated by Leo. There were some splendid names in the party of conservative reform: Leo X himself, San Giorgio, Cajetano [1]—not at all the implacable bigot of

[1] Tomasso de Vio of Gaeta, General of the Dominicans in 1534. He was Cardinal in 1517, and one of the greatest supporters of the Pope. He was Legate in Germany 1518, and dealt with the Luther trouble.

Froude's imagination—Erasmus, Sadolet,[1] abroad, and in England, Warham and Fisher, Colet and More. It seems strange that these could effect nothing visible, at the time ; it is but a striking instance of the powerlessness of intellect and worth in this world against popular passion and violence. All popular movements are more or less suspect, and the Reformation at its outbreak (in Germany) was popular ; that is, it appealed to the uncultured and common, however much it was subsequently patronized by the princes of the Empire for their own territorial aggrandisement. At that period there was still time to avert the desolation of Christendom ; within a few years the party of innovation had advanced beyond any possibility of conciliation. It so happened that the leader, Luther, was a man who was irreconcilable by nature : if Melanchthon, who was indeed the intellectual head of Protestantism, had been also the popular leader, some understanding between him and the Holy See might conceivably have been reached ; but popular

[1] Bishop of Carpentras and Papal Secretary of State.

leaders always lack reason. Goethe said that the progress of mankind had been thrown back for centuries when popular passion was called up to decide questions which belonged to thinkers. At this momentous period of the world's history it seems probable, however, that more than human activities intervened.

At Louvain a concerted attack on all Erasmus's work was being planned, and the storm soon broke on him. The hostility of the orders at Louvain was very great, but Leo decided every point which they raised in favour of Erasmus, nor could the Emperor be roused to hostility. Anyhow, the great explosion caused by the Wittenberg theses (1517) made all else seem in comparison to be insignificant. This is no place to outline Luther's history and influence, but his connection with Erasmus is important.

Luther came into fame, even into history, with his ninety-five theses. He first wrote to Erasmus in 1516, but the very next year saw the fundamental difference between the two. In 1519 we have a letter from Luther in which the difference is

minimized and hopes for mutual respect are entertained ; the quarrel was still only latent. Luther was very nervous about his position, as his dedicatory letter to Frederick of Saxony showed ; his friends were even more uneasy, and sought eagerly the support of scholars. Erasmus only knew of Luther by repute and some slight correspondence ; he did not read his works, but knew enough about them to oppose Froben's publication. Erasmus did not respond to the appeal at all cordially, and made no concealment of his dislike of the trouble which he saw Luther's ways would create. At the same time he said that he had already helped to defend him without in any way committing himself to Luther's views. But, as time went on, Erasmus looked upon Luther more and more as the worst obstacle to peaceful reform and fatal to his own projects. By the curious nemesis which awaits heresy, Luther in turn regarded the later extreme reformers much in the light that Erasmus had regarded himself. Erasmus further wrote to Wolsey saying that he held no brief for Luther, thought

him imprudent, but would not decide on any one of Luther's points ; he himself will always be found on the side of the Holy See. Even when Luther's action had been condemned by the Pope, Erasmus wrote to Albrecht of Brandenburg, Archbishop and Elector of Mainz, to urge moderation in the matter of the indulgences and monastic orders and giving a qualified sort of support to Luther.[1]

The Elector of Mainz was a great friend of Erasmus, who regarded him as belonging to the conservative party of reform. The Elector was also a close friend of Leo X and one of the most powerful of churchmen ; he it was who had the chief interest in the sale of the indulgences associated with the name of the Dominican Tetzel, and it must have required some courage on the part of Erasmus to risk giving offence to his highly placed patron. Albrecht took it all very well. He was obviously a secularly minded young man who really

[1] This magnanimous letter was given a force, which was far from Erasmus's intention, by the act of Hutten, who, by interpolating *noster* before *Lutherus*, gave it a wholly favourable sense. This dishonesty accentuated the differences between Erasmus and Hutten.

had no suitability for the office of archbishop and cardinal. As Elector he was quite satisfactory ; and, in regard to his magnificence and liberality, he was worthy to be the friend of the Pope.

This apparent contradiction in Erasmus's attitude is probably best explained by his fear that if Luther were to be wholly suppressed, learning and enquiry would likewise suffer ; the ultra-conservative elements, more especially Erasmus's old enemies, the friars, would triumph overmuch, and he himself might not improbably come to be in a position of some difficulty if not of actual danger. Moreover, Luther's vagaries had at least, so thought Erasmus, caused the theologians to study afresh the Fathers. Erasmus was alive to the existence of several abuses, and doubtless in the matter of the indulgences he thought that a salutary shock had been given to the authorities. He never attacked the theory of indulgences, but the manner in which the Elector and Tetzel manipulated them. Luther raged against the whole theory and the successor of St. Peter as well.

It may be pointed out that the Elector's action was indefensible. Tetzel was rather less to blame, and no condemnation of quæstors and corrupt gains could be more severe than that embodied in the decrees of the Council of Trent.[1] Copies of Erasmus's New Testament, with notes, spread rapidly over Europe and caused alarm to some. Leo X had already given his special patronage to the work and refused all the clamours for an examination of Erasmus's work. Now this alarm was perfectly natural; the Vulgate had come to be regarded as almost equally inspired with the original, although St. Jerome particularly says that he was not so; and by his alternative, and in some cases unreliable, retranslations it seemed to some as though Erasmus had made havoc of the Holy Scripture. Nor were their fears for the future unfounded. In the popularization of the New Testament lay all the strength of the future heresies:

[1] "Statuit ut posthac in quibuscumque Christianae religionis locis eorum nomen [i.e. questores] atque usus penitus aboleatur." (Sessio xxxi, caput ix.) ("It is decreed that henceforth, in whatever regions of Christendom, their name and employment be utterly abolished.")

for, apart from Erasmus's own errors of translation, it was but the precursor of many editions of the Bible, some wholly heretical, some free from serious error, but all lending themselves to the most kaleidoscopic interpretations when individual judgement ran riot on certain texts without the control of the Church. Erasmus intended all his writings to be for learned and calm circles; he disliked and mistrusted all popular enthusiasm, and Luther's own type of mind was itself the scholastic one to which Erasmus so much objected. He feared a sort of new and, to him, more intolerable scholasticism if Luther's views were to prevail. Erasmus, in common with most scholars of the day, had an unnecessary and invincible prejudice against scholasticism; not only against the debased form then current, but, with one or two exceptions, against the whole philosophy. In our own days scholasticism is again coming into its own.

Luther now wrote to Erasmus asking for active help. This was particularly unwelcome to Erasmus. The most active

enemies of Erasmus's New Testament were the Dominican, Hochstrat, whom we have met, the Carmelite, Egmond of Louvain, and more especially Lee, afterwards Archbishop of York. Another Carmelite, Nicholas Baechem of Alkmaar, was a later enemy of Erasmus ; and Miles Standish, afterwards Provincial of the Franciscans, one of the most servile of all churchmen to Henry VIII, was another pet aversion of Erasmus's.

Erasmus was temperamentally hostile to radical measures ; he desired reform, slow, gradual, mitigated. He wished to confine all discussion to theologians and scholars. He struggled to draw Melanchthon from the fury of dispute and destruction which he saw coming.

"Malim te plus opere sumere in asserendis bonis literis quam insectandis harum hostibus. Praeterea certandum est nobis ut non solum eloquentia verum etiam modestia morumque levitate superiores illis videamur." [1]

[1] "I could wish you rather to be engaged in spreading about the knowledge of learning than in combating its enemies. Moreover, we must strive not only by our eloquence, but by the modesty and ease of our manners, to show ourselves their superiors."

Erasmus had some difficulty in maintaining his ground, so fierce was the attack on different sides in spite of the unfailing support of the Vatican ; and openly to help Luther after the Papal condemnation would have been fatal. He constantly asserted : " Lutherus tam mihi ignotus quam cui ignotissimus " [1] ; and, again, to Leo X he wrote : " Non sum tam demens ut contra summum Christi Vicarium ausim quidquam qui ne peculiari quidem episcopo meo velim adversari." [2] He firmly refused Luther's appeal, thus gaining the lasting hostility of the Protestants and yet not wholly conciliating many Catholics. The truth is that Erasmus, who always opposed ignorance and abuses, felt no call to sacrifice himself for a cause which was not his own ; he foresaw to some extent what was coming in later years, and, if he had lived longer, would have become far more strongly Papal. In the autumn of 1520, therefore, matters

[1] " No one can be more unknown to anybody than Luther is to me."

[2] Louvain, September 1520. " I am not mad enough to attempt anything against the supreme Vicar of Christ, I who would not contradict even the bishop of my diocese."

were on the edge of a catastrophe, and the world waited. Luther had burned the Bull and a copy of the Decretals, thereby challenging the Pope to a trial of strength ; the young and recently elected Charles V had summoned the Diet to meet in January 1521 at Worms. There was no doubt whatever as to the attitude of Charles or of his orthodoxy, although he was not expected to be the ally of the purely conservative school of Louvain. Luther's resources were indeed slender, and the elements of success on his side appeared to be almost negligible. In reality his appeal to German nationalism, as opposed to Italy, had deeply stirred the masses ; it soon brought his cautious adherent, the Elector of Saxony, openly to his side, and it even to some slight extent awoke response in the mind of Charles V. Luther himself had little hope for his cause or even for his own safety when he set out for Worms.

Erasmus had stirred up several wasps' nests, and was far from being comfortable. He had dedicated his *Ephesians* to Cardinal Campeggio, and probably hoped to return to what was still the more peaceful England

under the Cardinal's protection. Campeggio was a very learned canon lawyer, and was regarded as a strong supporter of the revival of letters. He had taken orders after his wife's death. Erasmus, in the same year (1520), wrote to Henry VIII as well as to Mountjoy and Pace, Sir Henry Guildford, and Wolsey with the same object in view—that of establishing himself in England. Henry had before assured him of a second living, and from Warham he had had repeated offers of welcome. Previously he had seemed indifferent as to English help, but times had changed. However, either from Imperial pressure to stay, or from lack of any real welcome to England, or perhaps owing to the fact that the facilities for printing were very poor in England compared with those on the Continent, all this came to nothing, and he never re-entered England.

Campeggio and Aleander,[1] who was to

[1] Girolamo Aleander was Nuncio to the Elector of Saxony. He was well qualified for the post owing to his intimacy with the German affairs. He was a highly cultured man; latterly, as matters in the Empire became more critical, he regarded *the tribe of poets and grammarians* as the worst enemies of the Holy See.

conduct the case against Luther at the Diet, came to Louvain to consult Erasmus, and from the other side came urgent requests to Erasmus for support, possibly from the Landgraf of Hesse or from the Elector of Saxony. He refused all support for Luther in an answer to some well-known person, *Vir praepotens*, at whose identity we have hinted. It is an appeal to moderation: "The matter can be arranged by the Pope, your Highness, the Princes of the Empire, and the scholars, if only the vulgar mob are kept out."

"I will not join Luther until I see he is on the side of the Church; but if there is to be a cleavage and the Church is torn in two, I will stand on the rock of Peter until the return of peace."

The Diet finally met on January 28, 1521, and Leo X had already issued the Bull "In Coena Domini," in which Luther was mentioned by name as an enemy of the Church. The appearance of Luther at Worms was a courageous act, but the courage has been somewhat exaggerated by historians. What else could he have done?

Sooner or later he would have been hunted out ; there was no place of retreat, for, as Froude remarks, the Church was everywhere ; Protestant [1] countries did not yet exist, and he had some remote chance before the Diet.

Charles was not impressed by Luther : " This man will never make a heretic of me." Luther was simply asked if he acknowledged the authorship of certain works, and then was required to retract. He refused. The ban was pronounced, but he was given until the expiration of the safe-conduct before judgement should be executed. The significance of Worms turns on the fact that, for the first time in history, a private person had defied Church and Empire without coming to grief. It is true that the reprieve seemed likely to be of the shortest kind, for no one could foresee how Luther, on his way home, was to be carried off by sham brigands to the castle of Wartburg, and there kept hidden until, with the outbreak of war, Charles

[1] It is historically exact not to speak of Protestantism until after the Recess of Speier. The *Protesters* were six princes and fourteen cities. Strictly speaking, Lutherans alone are entitled to the term.

needed the help of all his Germans. It was then, to use his own words, " No time to talk of Luther." To what extent Charles was wholly ignorant of the Elector's action is a debatable subject. George, Duke in Saxony, and certain others were in favour of following the precedent of Sigismund at Konstanz and ignoring the safe-conduct. Erasmus thought that Luther had done for himself, and was anxious to save Melanchthon from being involved in the same ruin. In May 1521 he wrote to Jonas Jodocus that by his " Babylonish captivity " and other acts Luther had willingly provoked his fate. In the same strain he wrote to Warham, at the same time regretting that, with the times so much in favour of reasonable reform, Luther had not shown more sense and moderation. Much the same sentiment was entertained earlier by Machiavelli with regard to the failure of Savonarola. As the year wore on it became clear that all was not over with Luther, and Erasmus wrote again to Warham complaining of the dangerous situation and saying that he must read Luther's works and write something about

him. Erasmus, like Blessed Thomas More and other excellent men of the day, was in no way inclined to change the old beliefs for new. There was an enormous difference between a reformation of the Church's discipline and a change of doctrine. All his friends, bishops, Aulic Councillors and others urged on him the necessity to write and put down Luther by the force of his learning, as well as to clear himself from all complicity with the heretical movement. Mountjoy wrote very strongly on the subject, and he was speaking for More and Fisher quite as much as for himself.

We have reached a crisis in the world's history. Worms forms the great dividing line. The events before and after that Diet are so dissimilar that they must be treated in the next chapter. The various actors in the course of events, so far as we have gone, have to choose on which side they will stand, and a definite party of Reformation—that is, of innovation and heresy, irreconcilable to the claims of the Church—henceforth existed. More, it sprang up to its full stature in a sur-

prisingly short space of time, and Erasmus, whose younger days and maturity had been passed in a society which could not imagine any serious schism, lived to see not only Lutheranism, but, such is the fissiparous tendency of heresy, far more advanced opinions, prevail. Lutherans were, after all, the conservative Reformed ; behind Luther came the Sacramentarians, originally led by Zwingli, and the sour figure of Calvin, whose system exercised such a fatal fascination over Scotland and then over England. Nor was this all ; the vagaries of Carlstadt [1] and Martin Cellarius followed, down to the sheer insanity of the Munster Anabaptists. To all of these Luther was as much opposed as to the Church ; Melanchthon, very much more so. Erasmus took but little interest in or notice of them. He was concerned only actively with Luther, for, entirely as he

[1] Andreas von Bodenstein threw himself into the advanced wing of reform 1520, after the Leipzig disputation (with Eck). He first gave up the ceremonial of the Mass, which Luther in some fashion had preserved at Wittenberg, sympathized with Zwingli, with the revolted peasants, and even with the Anabaptists. After 1534 he professed theology at Basel, and spent his time in quarrels with his old friends.

repudiated Luther's doctrine, he had had originally a vague interest in the latter's protests. He also felt in some way rather uneasy as to his own share in the disaster. His enemies always said that by his translations and paraphrases of the New Testament he had paved the way for Luther, and by his satires and jests at the expense of some of the orders he had unchained a tempest against the religious in general. There is some truth in that accusation. Erasmus and other scholars laid an intellectual basis for revolt, and Erasmus did in fact encourage a movement which took a course he never wished or intended, but which, with all his genius and prestige, he found himself entirely unable to control. The Popes, in turn, recognized his surpassing intellect and his essential honesty ; but it is not always prudent, in dangerous times, to allow a critical spirit too great liberty and, until the mischief was done, Erasmus put but slight restraint on the expression of his wayward and mordant genius. Some of his writings would have been better if confined to a more narrow

circle. Schiller reflects, in his Wallenstein trilogy:

"The action was mine so long as it remained in my bosom; but, once sent out from its safe nursery into the foreign, it became the property of those sly malicious powers which never art of man conciliated."

Erasmus was conscious of his power and the undeserved attacks made upon him contributed to make him satirical. He knew that, if he were to go over to the Lutheran party—and there was no lack of pressure to persuade him to openly declare for them—the case would be virtually settled in the learned world, and his action would have a far-reaching effect on the attitude of Catholics who were somewhat shaken in their allegiance.

Julius Pflug of Leipzig and Naumburg thought that Erasmus could act as mediator between Melanchthon and the Emperor—he recognized that Luther was hopeless—by compelling both to give way on certain points. Erasmus himself said that, if he had any trace of heresy in his nature, he would long ago have sought refuge with

the Lutherans, so deeply had the attacks of some of the orders affected him ; he, however, made no sects, and all enquirers who came to him he directed to apply to the Church for information. The hostility of the orders varied, but Erasmus referred to the Carmelites, the Franciscans, especially the observant branch, and some way behind these the Dominicans, as his most persistent enemies. After all, these orders had been the object of his special attack in the *Encomium* and in other writings. The Society of Jesus was not of course formed, though the original members were younger contemporaries of Erasmus, and a story[1] relates that St. Ignatius read some of Erasmus's New Testament, but could not continue it, as he found it depressing. This, even if not true, is interesting, for it shows the fundamental difference between the two types of mind. Doubtless St. Ignatius would not understand, nor indeed like, Erasmus's critical spirit, and the scholar would realize neither

[1] But another form of the story gives the book as the *Enchiridion Militis Christianai*, which had lately been translated into Spanish with the permission of the inquisitor Manrique.

the supreme genius, as great as his own, nor the sanctity of the Founder of the Company. We know, however, that for posterity and in our own times, in the spiritual and intellectual worlds, no names have greater significance than those of St. Ignatius and Erasmus. The birth and military training of St. Ignatius gave a distinct type to his mind. He regarded Erasmus as a force subversive of discipline in practice and not over favourable to respect for authority in the abstract. He would not allow the younger members of the Company, at any rate, to read Erasmus's works, and the Society has never regarded him with much favour. Erasmus is, in fact, an author whose works one would not recommend to those who had not a sufficient knowledge of his own times to enable them to estimate his genius and to discount his mannerisms.

Chapter IV

HIS TROUBLES AND LATER YEARS

HRIST I know, Luther I do not know; the Roman Church I know, and death will not part me from it. So wrote Erasmus early in 1520, when the question of Luther became pressing, if not dangerous. In November of the next year he wrote:

"I have no more to do with Luther than with any one else. I would sooner his errors were corrected than himself lost, but, as he has been scattering poison, the hand of the scatterer must gather it again."

And, more uncharitably:

"They may roast or boil Luther for all I care, it will be but one person the less in the world; but, in the interests of humanity as a whole, the papal party have been foolish. There is to be some sort of Edict—may it prosper! I do not care anything about Luther's

fate; but I like peace, and when once peace is disturbed the scum always comes to the surface."

How modern a touch! Do we not say the same thing after our experience of the past seven years? Erasmus was always in favour of stability at any price. No sentiment could have been less in favour of heresy than all this. Erasmus, at the same time, was wholly opposed to over definition, and many of the disputes of the day were centred round matters the discussion of which, if not exactly irreverent, was wholly unprofitable.

Erasmus disliked intolerance and probably in his heart thought that Catholicism was rather overlaid by definition; his dislike and fear of a false theology rigidly defined and intolerant, into which the Reformation very soon developed, was one cause of his hostility to Luther. The prevailing uncertainty was a constant irritation to him, and when irritated Erasmus became flippant and sarcastic. He diagnosed the troubles of the times with remarkable accuracy in his correspondence with his friends, but once his perspicacity

failed him: "The present tempest will not last long." Alas, it has raged for 400 years, and still is raging. Erasmus truly claimed, in a letter to Leo X, that he was the first to suspect danger in Luther when he warned Froben against publishing his works. He was now living at Basel so as to be better able to supervise his publications, and Louvain, as we have seen, was not a particularly comfortable abode. In the midst of the crisis Leo X died and Adrian VI ascended the papal throne. He was an old schoolfellow of Erasmus, in the Deventer days, as well as a fellow countryman. The new Pope was extremely simple and austere in life, and determined on a reform of discipline and the decrease of the expenses of the Vatican. A remarkably pious and excellent man, he was perhaps rather too complete an antithesis in character to his predecessor; he was somewhat of a shock to Roman circles, and frankly, was not wholly the kind of Pope the days demanded. Something of a statesman, or, at any rate, a Pope who had a wide insight into men and things and touched by the Renaissance was the great

need. Unfortunately, too, as a Dutchman and foreigner, he was not *persona grata* in Rome. Adrian had had little personal connection with Rome before his election. He and Charles were equally in earnest about reform, and he was above all determined to enquire into the abuses of the Roman Court which were arousing so much excitement throughout Europe. We know how great was the exaggeration of those who were personally interested in revolution, but some reform was desirable and no one could have been more suitable than the austere Adrian to carry it out.

Authorities were becoming annoyed at Erasmus's persistent silence on the subject of Luther in public, though he was eloquent enough in his private letters, and the Pope was not over-pleased at a letter from his old school-fellow. Finally, he was obliged to turn to his old friend, now the most learned and influential man in Europe, for help in his task (December 1522). This correspondence is interesting, for it reveals their attitude and their esteem for each other in spite of the difference between the two—the

earnestness of the Pope and the touch of levity in Erasmus's replies. "Exsurge, exsurge in adjutorium causae Dei et praeclaris dotibus ingenii quas ab eo accepisti utere."[1] Adrian reminds him that he can recall those who have been misled by Luther and bids him think of the words of St. James: "He that recovers a sinner from the error of his ways shall cover the multitude of his sins." Erasmus replied at length as to his good disposition, but referred to his ill health, and made the well-known parallel that to ask him to go to Rome was like asking a crab to fly. Erasmus's mind was like highly tempered steel which cuts everything that it touches. Adrian quickly stopped the outcry of the Louvain Carmelites, and Erasmus enjoyed his protection as well as that of the Emperor, the Imperial Chancellor, the Elector of Mainz, and many others.

Adrian VI, the last non-Italian to occupy the throne of St. Peter, reigned but a short time. His constitution was but ill adapted

[1] "Arouse yourself and rise in defence of the cause of God, and for it make use of the excellent gifts of intellect which you have received from Him."

for a permanent residence in Rome, and his plans were not allowed time in which to mature. Giulio de' Medici became St. Peter's successor as Clement VII. In Germany all was chaos. The Reformation had broken loose, monasteries and nunneries were destroyed, and the inmates dispersed, some of whom married. The shrines of the saints and images were pulled down and the crudest of doctrines, more particularly on the subject of predestination and free will, were becoming widely spread.

Luther was brought out from his obscurity at Wartburg by the Elector of Saxony, partly to combat the extremists and partly to organize the newly invented religion. Of all violent men Ulrich von Hutten was ever the most outrageous, and it was the fresh attack upon himself led by this man that determined Erasmus to act. So long as Luther was obscure and in danger Erasmus had no wish to attack him, but, as the active organizer of an ever-growing schism, the conditions became altered. Clement appealed earnestly to him to use his great powers on the side of the Church. Before all Erasmus had to

settle Von Hutten's attack. This was done in the *Spongia adversus Aspergines Hutteni*, 1523. Their friendship, long undermined, came utterly to an end; although Erasmus said of Hutten that he was his own worst enemy and shortly afterwards his meteoric career came to an end. Erasmus, now living mainly at Basel, was supported by pensions from three sources—Mountjoy's, Warham's, and the Emperor's; these three, as well as Blessed Thomas More, Blessed John Fisher, and the Duke in Saxony, combined with the Pope in exhorting Erasmus to deal plainly with the Lutheran heresy. At this time Luther wrote to Erasmus in a superior tone, very unlike the letters to which our scholar was accustomed: it was not exactly hostile, but Erasmus decided on war, and ended his reply: "Optarem tibi meliorem mentem nisi tibi tua tam valde placeret. Mihi optatis quod voles modo ne tuam mentem nisi tibi Dominus istam mutaverit."[1] Eras-

[1] "I could desire for you a better spirit were you not wholly satisfied with your own. Wish for me what you like except your spirit, unless the Lord change it."

mus originally meditated on a philosophical colloquy, the *Eirenicon*, but rejected it as not sufficiently pointed, and decided to attack more directly Luther's system by a book on free will, *De Libero Arbitrio*. Some have seen in this a mere attempt to confuse the issue, and to bemuse the world with a metaphysical discussion which could be protracted indefinitely without leading anywhere in particular.

Froude, an unsafe guide in Catholic matters, was no doubt right in this case, when he maintained that the contrary was in Erasmus's mind and that he designed to pierce the very heart of Luther's system. In the famous disputation Erasmus defined free will thus: "Liberum arbitrium est vis humanae voluntatis qua se possit homo applicare ad ea quae perducunt ad aeternam salutem, aut ab iisdem avertere." [1] It was an admirable definition for his purpose, though it is obvious that its scope is limited to the actual controversy. Erasmus triumphed easily. He said that

[1] "Free will is the power of choice by which every human being can apply himself to the things which lead to everlasting safety, or turn himself away from them."

the *Servum Arbitrium* of Luther was an old heresy, many times condemned and recently in Wiclif's case. His superior learning told : he cited all the Fathers and said that St. Augustine, if not misinterpreted, was certainly mistaken in this matter and that the vast majority of early authorities are for the freedom of the will. He said that Scripture, if you isolate texts, is contradictory, and such texts can be made to prove anything apart from the authority of the Church, and even so he interpreted the disputed ones very differently to Luther. Moreover, Erasmus considered that all these disputations scandalize the feeble and make for the edification of none. It was Erasmus's last great triumph : Fisher congratulated him on his victory, so did Henry VIII, and the theologians enquired exultingly, " Where is now your Luther ? " Luther was forced to reply, which he did with his usual violence, in remarkable contrast to the calm abstraction of Erasmus. In his reply, however, to Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio*, *Hyperaspistes*, Erasmus is almost as violent, and exercises his ingenuity in deriding

Luther's marriage. Erasmus, besides observing the Church's law in his own case, had probably a vague dislike of matrimony in general. In December 1524 Erasmus wrote a wise and moderate letter to Melanchthon.

"What is the object of destroying images and changing the Canon of the Mass? What is the good in telling youths that the Pope is Antichrist and that confession carries the plague; that they cannot do right if they try, that all things work from necessity, and that man can do nothing?"

More and his English friends, though well pleased with the two attacks of Erasmus on Luther, still desired him to make a complete and final demolition of the enemy. In a letter to More and in another to the Dominican Faber he expressed his inner thoughts, troubles, and difficulties. Externally matters went from bad to worse. The question of the "divorce" was beginning to agitate the world. Clement VII, allied with Francis I, was at war with the Emperor, and shortly Charles's mixed army of Catholic Spaniards

and German Lutherans captured and sacked the Eternal City. Plunder and sacrilege seems to have been carried out indifferently by Catholic and heretic. The only leaders of the rabble calling itself the Imperial army who could have restrained the horrors which were perpetrated in Rome, the Constable de Bourbon, the Prince of Orange, and even Freundsberg, all died before the assault. Erasmus was in despair. He had hoped that the Pope and Emperor would work together. Now he feared that, for political reasons, Charles would maintain the Pope in the Imperial interest, even as the Kings of France, after Philip IV's struggle with Boniface VIII, used the Popes at Avignon in the French interest. He wrote to Warham:

"Men now suppose that the Pope and Emperor will make a composition and that Clement will come out on the Emperor's side. It is all wrong; no peace will come in that manner. The Pope ought to be neutral between States."

These words of Erasmus might with

advantage have been scattered broadcast over Europe during the last seven years. Erasmus is always modern ; one cannot have a thought but one finds that he has been there beforehand. His residence at Basel was probably dictated by the fact that, in a stormy time, Erasmus preferred neutral ground. To reside in Italy or Germany would render him liable to be identified too much with contending factions. To France, since his early days, he was never attracted, and indeed the constant warfare of Charles and Francis would have made his residence there invidious as a subject of the former. At Basel he was in touch with all these territories, and communications to all parts were easy. Basel even then, to use an anachronism, was the greatest junction in Europe. Fresh trouble was awaiting Erasmus, for, whilst Luther's works, written in German, had but little circulation outside Germany, Erasmus's in Latin were read throughout Europe, and the Spanish theologians were taking alarm. Charles, whose orthodoxy since his attack on the Pope did not seem to be above suspicion,

allowed the demand of the Inquisition to examine the writings of Erasmus. At the same time he stopped the violent attacks which were being made on him in Spain, and, in a letter December, 1527, assured him of his esteem, told him that the enquiry was simply *pro forma*, and added that the whole Church was indebted to him. All the same, partly owing to the European political situation, partly to the English divorce question, Charles was inclining more and more to the conservative side, and issued a severe Edict for the repression of heresy in all its forms. Erasmus could not blame the Emperor and the Archduke Ferdinand, for they were good patrons of his ; but he lamented the death of thousands of human beings which he foresaw would be probable, and he was not deceived. It was not so much, he thought, a question as to what heretics deserved, but as to what was expedient for Christendom.

"The heretics challenged the Church and Emperor, and have deserved what they have got, but I wish this war to end ; it is better to cure a sick man than to kill him."

Erasmus at times, in his eagerness to check the abuse of pilgrimages and miracles, goes beyond the limit of accuracy :

" I have spoken of miracles. The Christian religion does not require miracles at the present time, and there are none."

No Catholic could possibly assent to that theory. He assists at the wonder of the Mass every week, possibly every day ; besides the fact that there are many well-authenticated cases of miracles from the earliest times to our own days. The attitude of mind which regards as authentic every miracle up to the death of St. John and every subsequent miraculous event as imaginary is most strange and illogical. Erasmus's stories of the depravity of monastic life are the result of his own unhappy experiences at Steyn, which coloured the rest of his life. People in good faith, doubtless, have often quoted Erasmus and said :

" Here is a picture of monastic life on the eve of the Reformation, and it is the work of a Catholic, not of a Lutheran ; if not true, it would have been immediately exposed."

Certainly Erasmus stands in a wholly different category to the Commissioners of Henry VIII, whose reports no one would heed unless he were already committed to approval of the dissolution at any cost, and it is not possible to ascribe dishonesty to him. The explanation no doubt is that the particular instances which Erasmus records were true; most regrettable, certainly, but does anyone suppose that every monk and priest is perfect? If such stories justified suppression, where would suppression stop? A sort of parallel are the stories, very one-sided, of public school life which appear now from time to time. Again, the particular instances are likely enough true and most regrettable; but no case could be made out for the destruction of such and such a school, still less—for the argument amounts to this—for the suppression of every public school.

With the outbreak of the Peasants' Revolt and the Anabaptist movement, ruin, social and moral, seemed imminent, and as the sky grew darker and darker, Erasmus became more serious and his bright nature

became eclipsed; but he continued his labours at scholarship as though there were no world convulsion in progress. His real convictions are contained in a letter of April 1529 to Ludwig Ber.[1] Personal discomfort and difficulty were to approach Erasmus ever closer. We have seen how he had been living in semi-retirement at Basel; now the Lutheran storm came to drive him from his quiet retreat. The reformers had been gradually growing in strength, and when they found themselves to be in a majority on the city council the change was quickly effected. Erasmus described, in a letter to Pirkheimer, the removal of altars, pictures, and images and the general defacing of the churches, similar to, but less violent than, the Gothic stupidity shown in Edward VI.'s reign. Basel almost immediately passed beyond the pure Lutheran phase. Erasmus had an interview with Oecolampadius,[2] who

[1] Printed as supplement to this chapter.

[2] Johann Hausschein, or Hussgen, of Wurzburg, 1482–1531. He read law at Bologna and theology at Heidelberg, where he also studied Hebrew. He corresponded with Erasmus, and at first was disinclined to follow the Reformation movement. Afterwards he became its chief exponent at Basel and Berne. He went considerably beyond Luther.

desired him to stay ; the reformer still hankered after the great scholar, but a heretic town was no suitable abode for him. He obtained an invitation from the Archduke Ferdinand to go to Freiburg in Breisgau, a town which was then within Austrian territory. Erasmus's pensions, except that from Warham, were not paid very regularly ; but valuable presents, mostly in the form of plate, from his admirers, as well ecclesiastics as laymen, helped him greatly ; his expenses at Freiburg seem to have been higher than in Basel. Otherwise he was well contented with the change.

In England matters took a decided plunge towards schism. Erasmus hoped and thought that the supple Campeggio would arrange the difficulty between Henry VIII and the Queen, as he confided to Mountjoy ; but the matter passed on to the decision of the Pope. Clement VII, a naturally weak and placable man, whose political vision was often obscured, showed himself the true successor of St. Peter when spiritual matters were concerned. Even to please the King of England, who, up to a certain point, and especially in the

affair of Luther, had deserved well of the Holy See, and even to avert a very probable schism, the Pope could not give judgement in his favour. When all is said, Henry, blinded by his desire for Anne Boleyn, turned savagely on the Pope, for the sole reason that Clement could not possibly declare his marriage to be null. Erasmus never gave any pronouncement on the subject, but, as may be expected from his innate love of peace and his conviction that personal interests are nothing when compared with the fate of a country like England, he hoped that, at any rate, Katherine would give way. Erasmus never did anything really base ; but to maintain peace he would go some way in condoning a wrong, and he lived in very difficult times. He was now somewhat out of favour at the Vatican ; the Pope was inclined to suspect that he was at the bottom of the welter, spiritual, moral, and material, in which Europe was involved, and his friends at Rome lacked influence or energy, so he complained to Sadolet early in 1530. The summer of that year saw the meeting of the Diet at Augsburg

where Melanchthon presented the famous Confession, by far the most conservative of reformed formulae. Practically nothing was denied, and the chief fault which the Catholics found was not its rejection of but its omitting to state the Catholic doctrine ; in deference to Erasmus, Melanchthon had even left out all reference to the unfree will. It is a much more *Catholic* production than Edward VI's Prayer Book. It was well that the violent Luther could not be present ; he was under the ban of the Empire; but even so all attempts at compromise failed. Charles declared that the cities must conform within six months, and called the Lutherans a sect. Some of the princes were annoyed and withdrew. Charles was equally irritated, and an Edict to enforce the restoration of the Catholic services and the restitution of church property was issued. We must remember that if "the sweet and reasonable" Melanchthon's confession was tolerable, the acts of many of its professors were intolerable, as may be judged from the Edict. The prescription of Catholic services, the seizure of Church property, the destruc-

tion of shrines and images, the forcible expulsion of monks and nuns, were going on unchecked in many places. Erasmus thought that, whilst the ultra-conservative party had shown over-eagerness to persecute, the Lutherans, as a wholly upstart faction and a minority, had been far too exacting. Erasmus was probably mistaken in thinking that Charles's real inclinations were for toleration, and attached too much importance to his own influence with the Emperor. That may have been true before the Reformation showed itself in the form of anarchy and fanaticism ; but Charles's naturally obstinate character was hardening under the open contempt of his authority. As a matter of fact, owing to the menace of the Turks and the attitude of Henry and Francis, the enforcement of the Edict was suspended. With relative peace in Europe Erasmus began to experience greater happiness. Clement VII again showed him favour, and the King of the Romans desired to confer on him some important ecclesiastical office. His state of health and age, for a man who had passed sixty

was at our period very old, prevented his acceptance, and Erasmus had, as well, a sentiment that matters had gone too far for the way of reason and moderation which he always favoured. Things, although quieter on the Continent, were getting worse in England as Henry developed his anti-Papal policy. More was dismissed from the Chancellorship, and heresy made great strides: although a gentle and humane man, he had ever been a strong opponent of error, and some stern measures had been carried out whilst he held the seal.

Warham died, and in him Erasmus lost one of his best friends and supporters; he did not lose his pension, for Cranmer, the new Primate and the last Archbishop but one of Canterbury, albeit a heretic, continued to pay it. The Act of Succession was passed, and More and Fisher having refused to swear to it, were committed to the Tower, 1534. Clement's unhappy reign ended soon after, and with the election of Paul III better times dawned. He had long been in favour of a council for reform and had intended to

summon one as soon as possible. The times were not favourable to moderation: the Anabaptist rising, which Erasmus regarded as the direct work of the devil, had been stamped out at Munster. Paul, however, was determined on the council and appointed new Cardinals, amongst whom he wished to include Erasmus and Blessed John Fisher. The Pope knew him for a holy and learned man, a partisan of moderate reform, and a friend of Erasmus; he could have given no better proof of his sincerity in the matter of reform. He had even tried to come to some understanding with Henry VIII, and must have been ignorant, strange as it seems, of the fact that the bishop was in the Tower; otherwise he would not have contemplated an act which would arouse the tyrant's rage. Meantime, Erasmus fell seriously ill; he was advised to try a change of air, and returned to Basel, though Freiburg was obviously the more healthy place of the two. Here he received the great shock of the news of the martyrdom of Blessed Thomas More and Blessed John Fisher, his dearest friends, and seemed for some

time to be unable to credit it. Erasmus had known Henry only in his younger days, when he appeared as a brilliant patron of arts, soldier and statesman, and could not believe that he had fallen into the horrible ways in which he finished his reign. His health grew steadily worse, and it was clear that he was never likely to leave Basel, but even in August, 1535, he spoke of an early return to Freiburg and of his intention not to remain in the Swiss city. The fate of the bishop and of the ex-Chancellor was only too clearly confirmed, and Erasmus wrote :

"They were the wisest and most holy of Englishmen. By the loss of More I feel to have myself died ; we had only one soul between us."

If a man, as is often alleged, can be judged from his friends, Erasmus must take a very high place. All his friends and correspondents were men of distinction and worth. Some indeed fell into heresy, and with them he parted ; but none of them were low or futile, and amongst his few intimate friends we find the names of the greatest and most saintly men of the day.

Erasmus might have had the red hat at any time. Paul was most anxious to confer it, if he had wished; but his ambitions, even his interest in life, were gone. Within a year he was dead, July 11th–12th, 1536. He died in loneliness attended only, it would seem, by a Portuguese friend and scholar, Damião de Goes,[1] and was buried in the desolated cathedral.

Erasmus was unfortunate at the end in the sense in which many illustrious men have outlived their popularity. If he had died after the triumph of the *Liberum Arbitrium*, he would have gone down to posterity not only as one of the greatest scholars of history, but as one of the great champions of Catholicism. He would have incurred the undying hostility of Protestants, it is true; but he has achieved that more or less as it is, and he would have avoided the suspicions with which many Catholics at the time and after

[1] He was born about 1500 and died in old age. Sadolet asked him to attempt the reconciliation of the Wittenberg reformers. Goes fell under the suspicion of the Inquisition in Portugal, and was sent to do penance at Batalha, but he died at his own house.

regarded him. There are some grounds for these suspicions. It was unfortunate that he died in a heretic town without the offices of the Church, but that was not his fault. His intention, as we have seen, was to leave Basel ; but he was anticipated by his fatal illness. To the end he protested most dutifully—servilely a French Protestant historian calls it—his complete submission to the Holy See. His refusal to accept the high honour which Paul III designed for him was made on perfectly genuine grounds. His health was gone, and his end not far distant. The judicial murder of his dearest friends had robbed his life of further interest. Such an attitude may not be strictly tenable ; there are always interests left ; but it is hard to blame such a welcome proof of his capacity for affection—a capacity which many of his acts and writings would otherwise leave in doubt. In his moderation he was much in advance of his times, and to be in advance of one's times does not make for material happiness. Erasmus's influence on the course of the political and religious events of his day

was slight. Dr. Karl Hartfelder well writes :

" Das Tragische seines Leben liegt nur darin, dass sein aushalten unter der Katholischen Fahne gerade bei den Anhängern der strengen Katholischen Richtung keinen Dank gefunden hat. Von Aleander bis herunter auf Döllinger und dessen Nachtreten escheint Erasmus als der Typus frivoler skepsis und charakterloser Unzuverlässigkeit." [1]

It is not necessary to labour his influence on the future of learning. Erasmus was constitutionally and intellectually incapable of leading a popular movement ; in fact, he despised all such and the facile enthusiasms which attends those movements. His tastes were aristocratic ; he believed in an aristocracy of intellect and had a decided leaning towards an aristocracy of birth. His mind, in this respect like Pascal's, whom he resembles in no other single way, was of an incurably

[1] " The tragedy of his life lies wholly in this, that his simple perseverance under the Catholic banner gained him no thanks from the followers of the strong Catholic party. From Aleander onwards, right up to Döllinger and his successors, Erasmus is portrayed as the typical frivolous sceptic and man of characterless uncertainty."

sceptic type, and he lived in times when such an attitude was most easily justified and produced. In all times of upheaval, strife, and misery, the greater minds show this tendency: nothing is worth struggling for; the world is literally very evil; take refuge in the things of the intellect. With the exception of his works on the Fathers and the New Testament his writings were critical and destructive; even when he entered the lists on behalf of the Church, he annihilated Luther's system rather than defended the threatened and vital doctrines.

In modern times Erasmus has more than come into his own: where controversy between the forces of all that is best in conservatism and in innovation is concerned, the Erasmian method is generally approved, and there are few who would not agree with his sentiment that warfare and slaughter for the sake of opinion are futile. At the same time Erasmus, and most modern thinkers, would hold that some opinions are so pernicious that in the interests of humanity they must be stamped out. He had no doubts about the Anabaptists; he would have as little about

some of our modern pests. The world's debt to Erasmus is very great. When all is said he was a *beau génie*, a loyal friend, humane and generous, a man of surpassing intellectual powers. Is it any wonder that, amongst so much that is true and noble, we find frailties and human weaknesses ?

* * *

Erasmus to Ludwig Ber, April 1529

" God alone knows how the end will come. We are being punished, it seems, for our sins. No annoyance will, however, withdraw me from the Church, but at times I have almost felt provoked to it. I will not assail the mother by whom I was washed at the font and fed with the Sacrament. To avenge a distinct wrong I will not imperil my soul. One can now understand how Tertullian and Wiclif were driven into schism by malicious attacks. I will not be so driven, although the attack made upon me is most unprovoked. All my efforts, and crime, if so they consider it, have been to promote true learning. It is true that I wished monks to remember their rule, and thought that the study of Scripture and the Fathers was preferable to the exclusive pursuit of the scholastics. I ever hoped that the

Popes and Cardinals might live in manner nearer to that of the Apostles, but I never desired them harm or abolition. As to the disputations about the manner of the Presence, it is incredible that Christ would so long have allowed the Church to be in error on such a matter. [What Erasmus means is the very practical argument that, after 1,500 years of belief in the Real and Substantial Presence, it is very improbable that a few men should be inspired to discover its falsity.] The Lutheran theory that any one person is as qualified in himself, apart from ecclesiastical order, as any other to ordain, absolve, and consecrate is sheer lunacy. [Luther held, as his own opinion, that wherever literally the two or three were gathered there was the Church in all its power. This theory does not figure in the Confession.] At the same time it is of no use for monks and prelates to think that they can stop the spread of error by mere shouting, nor will they be able to re-establish their old authority over the mass of the people. Some men are wicked, but that is no reason to give up our belief in the Church."

To Warham, Faber, and Tunstall he wrote in a very similar strain.

Chapter V

THE FRIENDS AND CORRESPONDENTS OF ERASMUS

ERASMUS'S early visit to Oxford, 1498, was of importance for the fact that, short though it was, in that town and in London he made his best friends, and acquired an impression which to some extent influenced his whole life. He was absorbing ideas amongst the choicest spirits of the day, a mode of life very different from his strenuous and troubled later years. It is far from clear who were present at the evening meals and discussions, which were presided over by Charnock, Prior of St. Mary's College, where Frewin Hall now stands ; our information is confused and fragmentary. Colet and Grocyn were certainly present, More and Linacre perhaps, and Wolsey possibly. We have two specimens of these discussions. One was on the subject of Cain and Abel, and it treated in the new Platonic manner then

in vogue at the Florentine Academy. As the discussion waxed warm, Erasmus told them a myth concerning the expulsion from Eden and a device of Cain to obtain good wheat-seed, which in Plato's style he asked them to accept as true. As an improvisation it is remarkable, and we find nothing else like it in any extant writings of Erasmus ; at the same time it could hardly have been composed beforehand, for there seems no reason to suppose that Erasmus had any idea that the discussion would turn on Cain.

The other, a far more serious subject, was on the Agony in the Garden. This was disputed between Erasmus and Colet. Erasmus held the common view that it was the dread of the coming tortures which caused Our Lord's Agony ; in the sense in which human nature would shrink from such a prospect, especially when the certainty of it was beyond a doubt. In all which individuals may dread, there is a possibility present to the mind, even if very improbable, that the worst may be averted ; but Our Lord knew for certain all that was to happen. Colet, on the

contrary, considered that it was the fate of the Jews caused by their rejection of Himself that was the primary cause of the Agony. Each maintained his opinion, but Erasmus was somewhat shaken in his certainty. It was at Oxford, too, that Erasmus first got the idea of the revived learning being used to aid Christian scholarship. It was Colet who first showed him how Greek could be put to other uses than the pure scholarship of which the early or Italian Renaissance alone took count. This influence may be easily traced in Erasmus's New Testament and his editions of the Fathers. His best editorial achievements are connected with those subjects, and not with the texts of the classics. His New Testament was a somewhat hurried piece of work, nor was it based upon the best MSS., which even then were accessible ; but it is remarkable for being the first Greek text which was widely diffused. Moreover, Erasmus, and with him Sadolet and Colet, attempted to give the actual meaning of the words in a philological sense rather than with a view to doctrinal or controversial purposes.

His New Testament would seem a very poor and inaccurate version to-day. Far more noteworthy are his editions of the Fathers. The text of St. Jerome had for some time been exercising men's minds ; but it was not until Erasmus undertook it that a successful edition appeared. The texts of many other Fathers, Latin, such as St. Hilary, Augustine, and Ambrose, Greek such as St. Basil, Irenaeus, and Athanasius, were much improved by his criticisms and in his careful editions. Erasmus regarded the study of the Fathers as an absolute necessity ; yet, as we have seen, he would not pin his faith to every statement of each and all, for some are contradictory, in the manner in which some divines were wont, he considered, to do. Furthermore, he did not hold St. Thomas in the contempt which was then general in the new world of learning. On the contrary, Erasmus saw that much had been most clearly and truly expounded by him, and that to have formed a consistent system and one capable of answering all difficulties was a great achievement, whatever might be thought of its power to convince. He

actually aroused Colet's anger by praising the *Aurea Catena*, for the excellent dean had a positive hatred of the great Scholastic and his works—a proof how many a good man has been blinded by prejudice or dazzled by a new but not necessarily infallible light.

The *Moriae Encomium*, perhaps the most popular, and certainly the best known, of Erasmus's writings, was thrown off in a moment of exuberance of spirits, and the author would be surprised to know of the many editions, commentaries and explanatory works which have been written on the subject. It is genuinely humorous and delicate: the trenchant satire, devoid alike of brutality or coarseness, and without malice, render it very unlike other contemporaneous squibs. Leo X was vastly amused by it. As everyone knows, it satirized the scholastic divines and the mendicant orders, as well as the gross ignorance, even of Latin, which characterized some of the theologians. Secular courts do not escape either. It is difficult to regard it as an effort to turn the contemporary theology into ridicule: it

attacked, not individuals as individuals, but types of mind, the blank obscurantism, and the attitude of those who refused to see in the revival of letters anything but evil. It was also in praise of More, and it is important to remember that there was no substantial difference between Erasmus's views in the *Encomium* and those of More himself, as is very clearly apparent in the letter which Sir Thomas addressed to the University of Oxford. The appearance of *Moriae Encomium* had dissipated the regard felt for Erasmus at the universities, more particularly at Oxford, and the outcry was loud and long.

Both universities forbade the students to buy or read any of Erasmus's works, not only the *Encomium*, and felt themselves confirmed in their belief that Greek learning was the mother of all mischief. Blessed Thomas More censured all this in his letter, which we have already noticed, by remarking that Greek needed no defence ; that all the best works of philosophy and theology, including the New Testament, were written in Greek ; and that, so far as philosophy was con-

cerned, the Latins were insignificant. Nevertheless, the battle at Oxford between Greeks and Trojans, as they called themselves, probably because the upholders of Latin really believed that the Trojans were the ancestors of the Romans (Vergil in the Middle Ages was regarded as semi-inspired), continued to rage, and Oxford was, it seems, overwhelmingly Trojan in sympathies. Later, in reply to some young theologian, apparently a monk, who wrote attacking Erasmus and warning More against his friendship, he replied very sharply :

"Erasmus does not ridicule your ceremonies, but only the superstitious use of them. There is no fear of the devil getting hold of you if you merely alter your dress : fear rather to lie and commit crimes."

Sir Thomas went on with a concrete instance of crime and superstition, similar to those to which Erasmus alluded in his strictures on pilgrimages. It sounds wholly incredible and from any other source but More we should have great difficulty in believing it. As it is it goes

a long way to justify the *Moriae*. In connection with the unfounded beliefs about the Trojans, we may notice Polydore Vergil, who settled in England and brought his Italian acuteness to bear on some points of our national history. It was he who first exploded the Brute myth and most of Geoffrey of Monmouth's tales and told the truth about Ste. Jeanne Darc. The Julius dialogues further excited the conservative spirits about Erasmus, more especially the famous or notorious *Julius Exclusus*, which was printed in Paris, and even put on the stage, where for political reasons it enjoyed a marked success. This was after Leo's accession, when peace was restored between France and the Papal States. Its point lies in a discussion—wrangle would be a better word—between Julius II and St. Peter over the Pope's claim to be admitted to heaven: St. Peter rejects him on the ground of his warlike habits and for other more discreditable reasons. Erasmus denied, at least implicitly, the authorship. It has been attributed, without much reason, to T. Andrelini, who had no motive whatever in not claiming to be the

author.[1] Certainly Erasmus did not, as a rule, write anonymously, and Leo himself regarded the authorship as unproved. Sir Thomas More accepted Erasmus' denial but thought that in any case, it did not matter much. Campeggio, on the other hand, had no doubt that Erasmus was responsible for it, and expostulated with him. His hatred of war and political intrigues and his dislike of a fighting Pope, which he regarded as unapostolic, to say the least, combined with the style of Latin employed, make the authorship of Erasmus very probable. Mr. Allen and the best modern authorities regard it as almost certain. There is no real harm in it, and it is quite in accordance with the political skits of the day. We should base our objections to it, and to most other contemporary politico-religious lampoons, not so much on the fact that a Pope was caricatured, but on the introduction of sacred matters into a squib which was merely intended to raise a laugh.

[1] Some have in it seen the work of Hutten. The most obvious thing about it is the bitter French party spirit. This tells against the authorship of Erasmus, and still more against that of Hutten.

The *Colloquies* owe their perennial interest to the graphic pictures which they give of the life and manners of the day, portraying the extreme ranges of which human interest is capable. They are entirely personal experiences, and are no doubt substantially accurate ; but they were composed over a long period and were written up for publication from notes, or possibly from some sort of diary which Erasmus may have kept. The pictures deal with all countries except Spain, Portugal, and Scandinavia, and with all sorts of folks, from Cardinals and noblemen to innkeepers, condottieri and downright rogues. They are wholly free from the querulous tone which is sometimes to be found in Erasmus's correspondence, and show a whole-hearted sympathy with humanity under every shape and form. Some of his letters, and notably the familiar one which describes in tragi-comical style his journey and sufferings between Basel and Louvain, seem almost as if they were meant to have formed part of the *Colloquies*.

More controversial than the New Testa-

ment which was under the special patronage of the Pope were Erasmus's *Paraphrases*. These were finished and appeared 1524. These *Paraphrases* were a sort of Latin commentary on the different books of the New Testament. They were very variously judged, but were received with enthusiasm by many of the clergy, and in particular made a good impression in England. The praise accorded to them later by Nicholas Udall, Katherine Parr, Edward, and Elizabeth does not tell much in their favour ; but Cardinal Grimani, to whom the first paraphase, that of the Epistle to the Romans, was dedicated, was pleased, and it was at the request of Cardinal Schinner that Erasmus went on to the Gospel according to St. Matthew. Erasmus had many meetings with this famous diplomat[1]; their esteem was mutual, and to him was dedicated the Paraphrase of St. James's

[1] Schinner was a native of the Valais and Bishop and Cardinal of Sion. His influence over the Swiss was ever directed against France : in England his anti-French policy was equally active. The "Oratio ad excitandum contra Galliam Britannos," extremely unfair to Louis XII, was a skilful appeal to the then anti-French prejudices of England. He died somewhat discredited.

Epistle. In the end only the Apocalypse was left untouched. The paraphrase of the Galatians was inscribed to Antoine de la Marck, abbot of Beaulieu Verdun. Almost alone of Erasmus's friends this prelate, both as a man and a priest, had a bad reputation. The *Paraphrases* were wholly suited for the learned, but less so for the vulgar. At that time there was so much inflammable material lying about that works harmless, and even useful in themselves, were apt to set the whole of it ablaze, and people seemed to lose all sense and moderation when fired with a few texts of the Bible in their newer form.

Erasmus's varied talents and the many sides of his genius can, however, only be completely realized from his correspondence. There, far more than in his actual works, he is revealed to us. There is moderation and common sense, and dislike of violence in controversy, even with those with whom he is least in agreement; there are exceptions to this moderation, but only under circumstances of great annoyance. Some of his letters, more particularly those which were addressed to his

influential patrons and to men whom he desired to enlist on his side, were doubtless conceived in a tone of exaggeration and flattery; we have already remarked instances which seem to contradict his love of plain speaking and independence of character. Such was the fashion of the day, and Erasmus, if intellectually in advance of his times, was not so with regard to the foibles and fashions. In most cases, too, this rather irritating style was the result of a real affection and respect for those to whom he was writing. The extraordinary diversity of his correspondents may be gathered from a short list of names. Popes and Cardinals, More, Fisher, Colet, Warham, Tunstall, the Elector of Mainz, the Prince of Carpi, the Duke in Saxony, and, on the other side, Hermann Von Weid, Archbishop and Elector of Cologne, afterwards a Lutheran, Luther himself, Melanchthon, Ulrich von Hutten, Capito,[1] Oecolampadius,

[1] Wolfgang Köpfel of Haguenau. He helped Erasmus with his New Testament, but declared for the Reformation 1523. He and Bucer, one of the chief inspirers of the Church of England, drew up the Tetrapolitan Confession. Erasmus parted company with him.

Zwingli, Myconius.[1] To all these extraordinarily dissimilar persons, to mention no others, Erasmus wrote freely and without restraint. His correspondents, to many of whom he wrote very frequently, ran into hundreds if we argue from those letters the origin and destination of which are uncertain. All this, too, was quite apart from his editing and other literary work, and gives some idea of the energy which was contained in so frail a body. Death and his own failing powers reduced the number of his correspondents towards the end of his life, and he had dropped all connection with the reformers whose names we have just noticed. Melanchthon alone, who receded further and further from Erasmus's position, he continued to regard with esteem, much as he regretted his openly taking a part, and a leading part, in the schism, from which he in vain endeavoured to dissuade him. Erasmus's correspondence with Johann Caesarius in

[1] Oswald Geisshüsler, one of the very few reformed who came from Luzern. He lived at Zurich on intimate terms with Zwingli, and finally became pastor at St. Albans, Basel. This ended his and Erasmus's friendship. The name Myconius was apparently given him by Erasmus.

1517 is interesting. He was writing of the *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum*:

"Epistolae magnopere mihi displicebant. Delectare potuisset facecia nisi nimium offendisset exemplum. Mihi placent lusus sed citra cujusquam contumeliam."[1]

He added that it was bad enough to be suspected of the authorship of *Julius Exclusus*, without being credited with that of the *Epistolae*. This Caesarius, who was a native of Julich, had migrated to Paris and was in many ways akin to Erasmus in spirit, and, in spite of being friendly up to a certain point with some of the reformers, like him, remained true to the Church.

We may now turn to a few other friends of Erasmus less famous than those whom we have come across, but still of interest as helping to illustrate Erasmus's nature.

To Martin Lypsius he wrote, 1518, to

[1] "The *Epistles* greatly displease me. The wit might have amused me, only the precedent was likely to cause such scandal. A good jest is pleasing to me, but not ribaldry." Ulrich von Hutten, who was mainly responsible for the *Epistolae*, was in Italy at the time of their publication. Crotus Rubeanus (Johann Jäger of Dornheim) had probably a good deal to do with the first part.

vindicate his New Testament from the attacks of Edward Lee, afterwards Archbishop of York, perhaps his most determined foe in England. Lypsius was one of Erasmus's most intimate friends. He was a native of Brussels, and a scholar and theologian of repute. He gave Erasmus very considerable help in the Basel edition of St. Augustine and St. Ambrose. He, too, was perfectly orthodox. Another much-favoured correspondent was Johann Turszo, a Hungarian, and Bishop of Breslau. He was a great patron of learning, if somewhat secularly minded for a bishop. Luther hoped to draw him to the side of reform, but, largely through the influence of Erasmus, he never went beyond an interest in classical learning.

With Johann Meyer (Eck) Erasmus's relations were not so good. Eck was in early days wholly on the progressive side, but after the actual outbreak of the Reformation he was the untiring opponent of Luther and others. Erasmus and Eck quarrelled, but there was a reconciliation. With so much in common it seems as though they ought to have been in close

sympathy ; but Eck, whether as a partisan of reform or upholder of the past, was rather too violent for Erasmus's taste.

Johann Wildenauer of Eger was another who for a time was attracted to Luther, but he fiercely attacked the *De Servo Arbitrio*. He was an admirer and follower of Erasmus as a man and as a thinker.

A very different type of mind was Jonas Kock of Nordhausen (Justus Jonas), a humanist and ardent admirer of Erasmus, but the Wittenberg influence proved too strong. Erasmus in vain strove to hold him back, for they had a mutual affection, by direct appeal to his scholarship and by drawing a picture of the Church reformed in discipline—reform combined with orthodoxy. This was ever the ideal in the mind of Erasmus. Kock, however, married and definitely joined the Evangelical party and finally quarrelled with and condemned Erasmus, 1527. This is a good instance of the tragical ending of several of Erasmus's early friendships through the diversity of religion. In every case the breach was made irreparable by his friend, and in no instance was it

Erasmus's own act. Of course, the attack on Luther began from his side, but Luther was one of his minor correspondents and in no sense a friend.

A still more tragical end of another friend was that of Louis de Berquin. He was a brilliant scholar and was for long under the protection of Francis I, but he translated into French some of Luther's writings and the *parlement* of Paris ordered his arrest. Besides that obvious offence he was accused of translating Erasmus's *Querula Pacis*, *Encomium Matrimoniae*, *Inquisitio de Fide*, and the *Modus orandi Deum*. These were condemned by the Sorbonne for reasons which are not apparent. Nothing could be less heretical than are these works of Erasmus. The doctors of the Sorbonne then and for long after had peculiarly acute scent for heresy. We can only guess that they had an especial antipathy to marriage, although it is a sacrament, and, as Frenchmen, a rooted distaste for international peace. Be that as it may, Berquin escaped with difficulty, only to be arrested by the Bishop of Amiens, from whose custody he was

released by Marguerite de Valois. Berquin then violently attacked the Sorbonne and all its works in a manner, this time, clearly heretical. In vain Erasmus, who was very fond of him, implored him to be more moderate. Finally, Berquin was rearrested and quickly burned in Paris.

There was also Jean de Pins, the antithesis of Berquin in character. He was a scholar of great charm, a diplomatist, and Bishop of Meaux, 1523. Wholly orthodox, Erasmus and Sadolet were among his best friends, and indeed three more pleasant people it is difficult to imagine.

Lastly, we will take Juan Vives. He was a brilliant Spanish scholar and wrote on a variety of subjects, religious, educational, political, and social. Perhaps, of all the intimate friends of Erasmus, he was the one who, after More and Fisher, was nearest the great scholar's heart. The two men of genius were alike protean in form, and Vives was also ardent in the cause of international peace—possibly the only man who in his heart agreed with Erasmus on that subject. Vives enjoyed great favour in England, where he was tutor to

the Princess Mary. He fell into a disgrace, which was greatly to his credit, for his support of Katherine of Aragon, and had to leave England. He spent his later years at Bruges, where he was visited by St. Ignatius. Never a cloud dulled the friendship of Vives and Erasmus.

The acquaintance of Johann von Botzheim, 1525, of noble Alsatian birth, was made later in Erasmus's life. Owing to a great similarity of temperament, they became very close friends. Botzheim was a canon of Konstanz, and at the Reformation the chapter moved to Überlingen. He often visited Erasmus at Freiburg, and died there. Both favoured reform in its earlier stages, both revolted from its subsequent iconoclasm and heresy, and both died out of favour with Catholic and Protestant alike.

The work of Erasmus is often said to have been wholly educational, and that his real desire was for edification and a wish to leave human society better. It would be truer to say that he desired society to be more intellectually honest ; but it is doubtful to what extent Erasmus aimed at

the improvement of the masses. A moralist he certainly was, though of a negative kind, and equally certainly one of the greatest popularizers of classical literature, whose effects were widespread and lasting. Amongst other things, he is responsible for the pronunciation of Greek which is still in use in this country. His system is doubtless wrong, but the effect has been lasting. He was singularly unattracted by art and the study of antiquity and philosophy, all of which occupied such a large place in the interests of the learned world. At the same time he had the most unbounded admiration for Leo X as the perfect type of Pontiff, his magnificence, kindness, learning, and humanity, his love of peace and of the arts—aims which cause no tears or unhappiness. Erasmus placed him as high above his predecessors as St. Peter's throne is above earthly thrones. Erasmus was thinking not of St. Gregory or earlier Popes but literally of Leo's predecessors, and he was right. It was a true historical judgement, not the device of the flatterer or politician. Politician Erasmus never was ; he could not,

of course, have understood the word in our sense. Erasmus had a curious dualism in his nature: a love of the Renaissance in its softer side, a delight in the refinements and comforts of life, and even its artificialities, combined with a love of truth and of practical morality, and over all a scorn of mental laziness and ignorance. A strange dualism is likewise apparent in his religious and ecclesiastical outlook. In his desire to get back to the Fathers and early Councils, in his eagerness to popularize the New Testament, and in his ridicule of much that was associated with pilgrimages and relics, he seems to stand, if not for Protestantism, at least for reform of a very marked kind; but we must do him no injustice. In these matters, as we have seen, he differed but little from the holiest and most orthodox of men. Ignorance was dense, morality was at a low ebb, abuses and corruption were rife, and so long as they dabbled not in heresy he was with the party of reform. An almost Voltairean delight in ridicule caused the offence which many of his writings and letters gave, and his prejudice against the

scholastics and his contempt for most of the theology of his day combined to give an almost Protestant aspect to his work. In spite of all this he retained a real reverence for authority. He distinguished very clearly between the authority of Popes (and bishops) and the self-made infallibility which characterised the attitude towards himself of some doctors of theology and of some of the orders. In other words, when the Church spoke in matters of faith he submitted, but in points of scholarship he would admit no superiority of theologians over himself. Possibly a somewhat proud attitude—and our scholar was not famed for humility—but honest and justified in fact. Erasmus, in scholarship and learning, was a head and shoulders over his enemies, whether of Oxford, Paris, or Louvain. He would take no part in spreading heresy, although in a sense he gave it an intellectual basis, and broke with all his acquaintances who definitely threw in their lot with Luther or other reformers. One of Erasmus's great aims was the reconciliation of Catholicism and antiquity. In spite of his neo-Platonism—

and Florentine learning had been his direct inspiration—his interest in religion was far more real than in philosophy. Keenly alive to the pharisaism of the day, rightly or wrongly he regarded the Christian religion as in danger of being reduced overmuch to the observance of rites and formulae, and thought that this detracted from the devotion which was due to Our Lord. In some respects in the freedom of his criticism of Scripture, notably in the doubts he expressed as to St. Paul's authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews and as to the identity of the St. John of the Apocalypse with the Evangelist, he went far beyond the reformers, but not beyond some writers of the Early Church. He, however, never persisted in any rash views ; as M. Denis well says : " Chez lui le cœur était moins audacieux que la pensée." [1] At one time the arbiter of cultivated Europe, he felt all the bitterness of failure when hostility enveloped him on every side. He was mistaken in looking for a period of light and peace, for a world freed from hatred and barren disputes, and the

1 " His feeling was less bold than his brain."

state of Europe, after 1520, was the measure of his disappointment ; but the mistake does not detract from his credit, though his optimism, like that of many a good man, was unwarranted. Reasonableness and light, though not exactly in the sense of Matthew Arnold, were what he greatly desired, and it seemed to him incredible that, in a world so full of interest and delight, people should engage in barren disputes and futile strife.

This attitude was the cause of his antagonism to Luther, whom he felt to be an ignorant barbarian ; of his quarrel with Hutten, whom he really liked, but whom he knew to be a firebrand, whilst the reasonableness of Melanchthon prevented any serious differences. Above all, let us remember that Erasmus was intensely human. He lived as a good Catholic, from feeling the innate reasonableness of the position of the Church. Intense convictions, in the Protestant sense, he never felt, and he was wholly unaffected by the logic which gave their strength to some of the new-fangled systems. Erasmus was enormously influenced by those of

whom he was fond, and personal affection had more to do with his ultimate beliefs than any process of reason. Newman indeed wrote:

"The heart is commonly not reached through the reason, but through the imagination by means of direct impressions. Persons influence us, voices melt us, deeds inflame us. We are not converted by syllogisms."

His affection for Blessed Thomas More and Blessed John Fisher, for Warham and Colet, his admiration for their learning and the effect of the martyrdom of the first two had as much as anything to do with his rejection of the new religion and his adherence to Catholicism, whilst the rebellion of several for whom he had real affection against the Church, caused him real grief and increased his dislike of the Reformation.

Not many years ago we should have said that the Erasmian spirit, rejected in the early sixteenth century, had returned to bring reasonableness amongst men; but at the present moment we are conscious of distinct reaction. As at the close of

Erasmus's life, those who counsel peace, reasonableness, and moderation obtain a poor hearing. "Cum his qui oderunt pacem eram pacificus, cum loquebar illis impugnabant me gratis." [1]

After all, Erasmus and those like him will never be exactly popular, though commanding genius will always make its influence felt; the Luthers, men not necessarily base but stupid, who shout, "Cursed be concord! Down with it to the bottomless pit!" will always be more loudly cheered.

[1] "Amongst those who hated peace I was pacific. When I spoke to them about it they attacked me without provocation."

Index of Names

Adrian VI : 66, 89–92
Aldrich : 53
Aleander : 77, note
Ammonius : 62, note
Andrelini : 123
Arnold, M. : 140

Baechem : 74
Batt : 47
Ber : 102, 115
Berquin : 133, 134
Bersala, Anne : 40, 47
Blount : 41 ; as Lord Mountjoy : 50, 59, 77, 81, 93, 103
Boleyn, Anne : 104
Boniface VIII : 97
Botzheim : 135
Bourbon, Constable de : 97

Caesarius : 129, 130
Cajetano : 66
Calvin : 23, 28, 82
Cambrai, Bishop of : 39, 40, 47, 59
Campeggio : 76, 77, 103, 124
Capito : 128, note
Carlstadt : 82, note
Cellarius : 82
Charles VIII : 19
Charles, Archduke : 63 ; as Emperor : 76, 79, 80, 90, 93, 96, 97, 98, 99, 105, 106
Charnock : 116
Chesterton : 24, 42
Chieregato : 62 note
Clement VII : 92, 96, 103, 104, 106, 107
Colet : 21, 28, 43, 53, 55, 67, 116, 117, 118, 120, 128, 141
Cranmer : 51, 107
Cromwell, T. : 23

Edward VI : 102, 105, 126
Egmond (Carmelite) : 74

Faber (Dominican) : 96, 115
Ferdinand, Archduke : 99, 103, 106
Ficino : 19
Fisher, Blessed J. : 49, 50, 67, 81, 93, 95, 107, 108, 109, 128, 134, 141

Francis I : 96, 106, 133
Freundsberg : 97

Goes : 110 note
Goethe : 19, 25
Gregory, St. : 136
Grey : 41, note
Grimani : 52, 126
Grocyn : 43, 116
Guildford, Sir H. : 77

Henry VIII : 23, 50, 52, 65, 74, 77, 95, 101, 103, 104, 106, 107, 108, 109
Hesse, Landgraf of : 78
Hochstrat (Dominican), 64, 74
Hutten, U. von : 32, 70, 92, 93, 124 note, 128, 140

Ignatius, St. : 85, 86

Jesus, Society of : 85, 86
Jodocus : 80
Julius II : 17, 48, 50, 59, 123

Katherine (of Aragon) : 103, 104, 135
Knox : 23
Kock : 132

Lee : 74, 131
Leo X : 18, 37, 48, 50, 64, 65, 66, 68, 72, 89, 120, 124, 136
Livy : 24
Lypsius : 130, 131
Luther : 20, 23, 67 et seq., 105, 113, 131, 133, 140

Machiavelli : 80
Mainz, Elector of : 70, 71, 91, 128
Marck : 127
Maximilian : 59, 64
Melanchthon : 22, 67, 80, 82, 96, 105, 128, 129, 140
Meno : 27
Meyer : 131
Mirandola, Pico : 19, 20
More, Blessed T. : 21, 43, 44, 55, 67, 81, 93, 96, 106–109, 116, 121, 122, 128, 134, 141
Mountjoy : 41
Myconius : 129, note

Newman (Cardinal) : 141

Oecolampadius : 102, note, 128
Orange, Prince of : 97

Pace : 77
Pascal : 112
Paul III : 107, 108, 110, 111
Peter (brother of Erasmus), 37
Pfefferkorn : 65
Pflug 84
Philip IV : 97
Pins de : 134
Pirkheimer : 65, 102
Poliziano : 19, 28
Porto da : 24
Pucci : 32

Reuchlin : 63–65
Richelieu : 33
Rogerus Servatius : 40, 59–62

Sadolet : 67, 104, 110 note, 118, 134
St. Bertin (Abbot of) : 46
Ste. Jeanne Darc : 123
San Giorgio (Cardinal) : 48, 49, 64, 66
Savonarola : 80
Saxony, Elector of : 22, 69, 76, 78, 80, 92
Saxony, Duke in : 80, 93
Scala : 32
Schiller : 84
Schinner (Cardinal) : 126, note
Sigismund : 80
Standish : 74
Symonds, J. A. : 19

Tetzel : 70–72
Thomas, St. : 119, 120
Trent, Council of : 23, 38, 72
Tunstall : 115, 128
Turszo : 131

Valois, Marguerite de : 134
Vergil Polydore : 123
Vives : 134, 135

Warham : 21, 43, 51, 52, 67, 80, 93, 97, 103, 106, 115, 128, 141
Wiclif : 95
Wied (Archbishop of Köln) : 128
Wildenauer : 132
Wolsey : 69, 77, 116

Zwingli : 82, 129 note

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